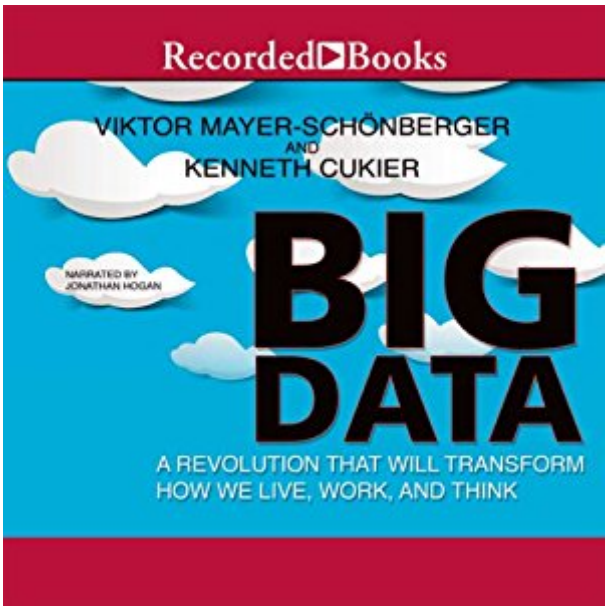
Big Data: A Revolution That Will Transform How We Live, Work, And Think



Synopsis

Oxford professor and author Viktor Mayer-SchÃƒÂ¶nberger joins Economist data editor and commentator Kenneth Cukier to deliver insight into the hottest trend in technology. "Big data" makes it possible to instantly analyze and draw conclusions from vast stores of information, enabling revolutionary breakthroughs in business, health, politics, and education. But big data also raises troubling social and privacy concerns sure to be a major talking point in the years ahead.

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Customer Reviews

"At its core, big data is about predictions. Though it has been described as part of the branch of computer science called artificial intelligence, and more specifically, an area called machine learning, this characterization is misleading. Big data is not about trying to "teach" a computer to "think" like humans. Instead, it’s about applying math to huge quantities of data in order to infer probabilities: the likelihood that an email message is spam; that the typed letters "teh" are supposed to be "the"; that the trajectory and velocity of a person jay-walking mean he’ll make it across the street in time - the self-driven car need only slow slightly. The key is that these systems perform well because they are fed with lots of data on which to base their predictions. Moreover, the systems are built to improve themselves over time, by keeping a tab on what are the best signals and patterns to look for as more data is fed in.But how does one choose a sample? Some argued that purposefully constructing a sample that was representative of the whole would be most the suitable way forward. But in 1934, Jerzy Neyman, a Polish statistician, forcefully showed that such an approach leads to

huge errors. The key to avoid them is to aim for randomness in choosing whom to sample. Statisticians have shown that sampling precision improves most dramatically with randomness, not with increased sample size.Today a third of all of ’s sales are said to result from its recommendation and personalization systems. With these systems, has driven many competitors out of business: not only large bookstores and music stores, but also local booksellers who thought their personal touch would insulate them from the winds of change.Will a world of predictions dampen our enthusiasm to greet the sunrise, our desire to put our own human imprint on the world? The opposite is actually more likely. Knowing how actions may play out in the future will allow us to take remedial steps to prevent problems or improve outcomes. We will spot students who are starting to slip long before the final exam. We will detect tiny cancers and treat them before the full-blown disease has a chance to emerge. We will see the liklihood on unwanted teenage pregnancy or a life of crime and intervene to change, as much as we can, that predicted outcome. We will prevent deadly fires from consuming overcrowded New York tenements by knowing which building to inspect first."

I would highly recommend reading it if you are into data. Big data seems to be the big buzz word currently and rightly so, we are collecting and storing more data than ever before. Using this data to make correct recommendations and decisions would be a huge benefit to human society as a whole. This book discusses how more data rather than sampling will help us obtain better correlations in order to make decisions (focusing more on the what rather than the why, in other what is happening and not why. E.g. Your carÃ¢Â Â™s engine is going to fail, you will get it repaired without necessarily wanting to find out why it is failing, this will come after the mitigation has taken place). The chapters are set out fantastically by how we are now collecting and using data, how we can obtain more data and how (and why) this will be useful. Furthermore, it also goes on to discuss the risks associated with big data (privacy etcÃ¢Â Â¦). moreover, it does all of this by providing fantastic examples that allows for one to follow the narrative very clearly.If you are looking to understand what the revolution is all about this book explains it very well without going into too detail about the tools that are used to get there.

This book addresses a hot topic for a large audience and provides a decent introduction. It outlines ways that big data has already impacted our lives and some of the history of big data, which not so shockingly, pre-dates our digital age.I gave this book three stars for a few reasons. First, it’s not meticulously edited and researched. The authors make simple factual errors, like perpetuating the

common mistake that SQL actually means "structured query language" (page 45, go read O'Reilly Learning SQL) to more subtle mistakes like generalizing medical findings from Amalga (page 128), considered a big disappointment/failure in medical analytics and not substantiated by other research. Overall, the authors are trying to write a convincing story and theme for big data without the requisite science or background that would lend the best examples or credibility (i.e. no Brian Greene here).I'm writing from the perspective of someone who has actually worked with big data, founded a company doing predictive medical analytics and who wants to learn more about the field. This book provides little in the way of helpful examples and its history is interesting but certainly not practical (i.e. Commander Maury "Pathfinder of the Seas" from the 19th century). It does a great job at synthesizing and thinking about the implications of big data. Their persistent theme of "what, not why" resonates and these guys are clearly good writers.Overall, I would recommend Automate This (Steiner) as a better alternative both from the depth of examples and making big data more approachable.

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