

# The state of big data reference architectures: a systematic literature review

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## Abstract

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## 1. Introduction

The rapid development of software technologies, the proliferation of digital devices and networking infrastructure of today, have by and large, augmented user's capability to generate data [1]. In the age of information, users are  
5 unceasing generators of structured, semi-structured, and unstructured data that if collected and crunched correctly, may reveal game-changing patterns [2].

The unprecedented proliferation of data have emerged a new ecosystem of technologies; one of these ecosystems is big data (BD)[3]. BD is a term emerged to describe large amount of data that comes in various forms from different  
10 channels. Within the years, BD has attained a lot of attention from academia and industry, and many strive to benefit from this new material. Howbeit, adopting BD requires the absorption of great deal of complexity and many traditional systems cannot cope with characteristics of this domain.

A recent survey published by Databricks in partnership with MIT Technol-  
15 ogy Review Insights, stated that only 13% of companies excel at delivering on their data strategy [4]. In the same vein, Vintage Partners highlighted that only 24% of companies have successfully adopted BD [5]. Sigma computing report presented that 1 in 4 business experts have given up on getting insights they needed because the data processing took too long [6]. Moreover, Gartner

20 approximated that only 20% of companies have successfully adopted BD.

Some of the most highlighted challenges of BD is 'lack of business context', 'organizational challenges', 'BD architecture', 'data engineering', 'rapid technology change', and 'lack of talent' [7]. Whereas similar issues may exist in other domains, it is exacerbated when it comes to BD systems. This is due the  
25 inherent complexity of BD engineering, the need for real-time processing, the scalability requirement of these systems, and the sensitivities around data.

Today, majority of BD systems are designed underlying ad-hoc and complicated architectural solutions [8], that do not seem to adhere to similar patterns. This will challenge software architects to design a suitable solution for any given  
30 context, creates a foundation for an immature architectural decision, and does not promote the growth and development of BD systems as a whole.

Therefore, since the approach of ad-hoc design to BD systems is undesirable and leaves many engineers in the dark, there is a need for more software engineering research for BD systems. To this end, this study presents a systematic  
35 literature review (SLR) on BD (BD) reference architectures (RAs).

## 2. Why reference architectures?

Conceptualization of the system as an RA, helps with understanding of the system's key components, behavior, composition and evolution of it, which in turn affect quality attributes such as maintainability, scalability and performance [9]. Therefore RAs can be a good standardization artefact and a communication medium that not only results in concrete architectures for BD systems, but also provide stakeholders with unified elements and symbols to discuss and progress BD projects.  
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This approach to system development is not new to practitioners of complex system. In software product line (SPL) development, RAs are utilized as generic artifacts that are instantiated and configured for a particular domain of systems [10]. In software engineering, IT giants like IBM have referred to RAs as the  
45 'best of best practices' to address complex and unique system design challenges

[9]. In other international standardization, RAs have been repeatedly used to  
50 standardize an emerging domain, a good example of this is BS ISO/IEC 18384-1  
RA for service oriented architectures [11].

### 3. Why this systematic review is necessary?

Despite the undeniable benefits of RAs, and their potential to solve some of  
the complex issues of BD systems, we think that this area is underdeveloped  
55 and needs more attention from both academia and practice. This insight is  
derived from our preliminary curiosity in academia, and a search for available  
big data RAs. By searching almost all available indexing engines and academic  
databases, we could only find a handful of BD RAs. This was not a cross-  
sectional approach, but rather a longitudinal method to constantly scan the  
60 state of the art within the last 3 years.

By the result of our observation, the most comprehensive BD RA published  
was the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) BD RA which  
was published by Big Data Public Working Group (NBD-PWG) with partici-  
pants from academia, practice, non-profit organizations, agents, and government  
65 representatives. This was announced as an initiative from White house in March  
2012, and the BD RA was published under the title 'NIST Big Data Interoper-  
ability Framework: Volume 6, Reference Architecture' in October 2019.

Given the substantial investment on BD RAs, one might infer the value of  
these artifacts, and this can in turn highlights the necessity for more research  
70 in this domain. Another factor that worths mentioning is how vaguely the  
phrase 'reference architecture' is defined and institutionalized. For instance,  
the difference between a 'concrete architecture' and a RA is hardly discussed,  
and

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#### 4. Front matter

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Here are two sample references: [? ? ].

#### 6. Improvements

1. The current writing style looks like a summary description, lacks new insight on the topic. The overall contribution needs to be enhanced.
2. The author raises seven research questions, but how does the author develop these questions? Are these real questions that have never been discussed? The research questions need to be developed according to the literature. In this way, we can realize what is the gap on this topic.

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- 100 3. The inclusion criteria and exclusion criteria are ambiguous and question-  
able. Is it possible for readers to reproduce this study according to these  
criteria? Did the author perform the reliability and validity tests? The  
author needs to provide more detail about the review methodology.
- 105 4. In general, each larger-scale system requires a more understanding of ar-  
chitectural components, owing largely to the complex nature of system  
architects. However, I cannot find a case that the authors demonstrate  
the uniqueness of BD systems, and the actual development challenges in  
BD systems.
- 110 5. Although this study adapts SLR approach, it should not completely miss  
a literature reviewing section. It is necessary to provide to the reader the  
preliminary details which are necessary to understand the purpose of this  
study, techniques and key concerns of the various research work that the  
authors have reviewed. There is no theoretical argument to support the  
development of the research questions.
- 115 6. The findings yielded by investigating the research questions of this SLR  
should constitute many discussion points around the research and prac-  
tice of BD systems. However, the manuscript is completely missing a  
discussion section. One should expect that the results of SLR can inform  
the current knowledge and provide several research directions for future  
120 research.
- 125 7. Last, one of the core challenges with the paper is to situate it within an  
ongoing scholarly conversation. The authors currently reference a fairly  
diverse set of papers, but remain at a fairly abstract level when it comes  
to elaborating how your work builds upon and expands existing work. In  
turn, this makes it difficult to appreciate theoretical implications of your  
work.

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