

Global Pandemic: Implications on Data Science

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The world economy has seen an unprecedented crisis during the global pandemic, the worst since the great depression. For a person working in a seemingly novice field of data science, the expectations from this career path might be muddled in uncertainty. If we learned anything from the 1919 flu epidemic the industries effected most were service and entertainment, especially the service industry which suffered double digit losses [1]. People categorize data analytics as a service industry modelling itself after IT, a few decades earlier. So if you are an aspiring Data Scientist are you making the wrong choice now in light of current events? If you have already made this choice then how to set your expectations in the aftermath of events that are yet to come?

The somewhat frustrating answer to these questions like difficult ones generally garner is “It depends”. Yes, the way this would affect the field of data science entirely depends on how the companies look at their data assets and what level of importance is asserted to them in the corporate food chain. This is the moment of truth for the companies to take a firm stance on looking at data as an accessory to their existing operational ensemble or an integral part of decision making to be incorporated in overall strategic thinking of the company. Yes, data science independently is a service based industry that can dwell into a problem at need while being a third party outsider. In an increasingly digitized world, this need-to-know basis of data exploration can leave major gaps in knowledge and also rack up the costs of onboarding new experts. Companies which have looked at data science in this way are likely to off load their high paying adhoc experts when the economic impact of pandemic hits.

But companies which have incorporated data science into their strategic belt are the most to benefit out of this. From the data collected in US during the 1918 pandemic we know, cities which have implemented early Non-pharmaceutical interventions (NPIs) such as social distancing did not experience adverse economic impacts over a medium term. Cities which implemented these measures aggressively experienced an increase in real economic activity owing to their quick responsiveness [2,3]. During the new norm of social distancing many companies are innovating, keeping data science in the forefront of their approach. Examples such as Alibaba, who transformed their operations during the 2003 SARS epidemic by taking their business online just as people were self-quarantining comes to mind.

US based startup Inokyo has built a product Act, to help companies to establish contact tracing for their employees in warehouses and workplaces [4]. As we are familiar with the same technology in Aarogya Setu, it will help the companies to maintain safe working environments for essential workers. OmniLabs is developing telepresence robots to facilitate virtual visits to senior citizens and infected loved ones and Aunt Bertha, a social care network start-up is bringing together emergency care workers and people in need together and accelerating its growth during covid. India just legalized telemedicine for primary care because of Covid-19 crisis. Start-ups such as Second Medic of India will explode and live long after covid-19 due to the extensive customer base it plans to generate during this time [5]. The applications for remote asset management and automation are not an option anymore, they are a necessity.

Like any wartime country which modernizes its warfare, the war on the invisible enemy presents us with an opportunity to modernize our operations with the help of data and technology. Finally, I would

like to leave you with the words of Sam Altman the CEO of Open AI, “This will be a before moment and an after moment for the world, there’s incredible innovation coming” [6]

References

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