Medici Effect – Harish Ravishankar (harish22@ufl.edu/UFID:86621191)

During my formative years in school, I loved Quizzing. Quizzing came to me naturally given my voracious reading, penchant for watching documentaries and an early habit of reading the news. It was something I became known for in school, participating and winning prestigious local circuit quizzes. I was sent to represent the school both zonally and nationally in competitions. Unfortunately, my zest for quizzing died down as I entered college. Given my heavy course load, and involvement in other clubs, my participation in quizzes reduced drastically. My years in college also coincided with the boom in internet in India. Soon I found an alternate avenue to fulfil the need for quizzing in my free time. Online quizzes became my hobby, and unlike regular quizzing which just gives one a split second to arrive at answers, which you either know or don't, online quizzing was lot more nuanced and time consuming. I often found myself going to search engines (which weren't well developed at the time) like Ask Jeeves, Google etc to work out answers. I recall wondering if search engines had all the answers stored inside them. The world's knowledge was just a click away, but how? My curiosity began with asking google self-awareness questions like how it worked. That lead me to discovering about the PageRank Algorithm written by Larry page and Sergey brin. My time on yahoo also yielded in other hobbies like Online chess. Was the computer truly "thinking" its way to victory? Such questions about data, machine intelligence, search engines lead to my interest in computer science. I started taking up many computer science credits in college, and eventually built a rudimentary knowledge base that asked and answered questions related to Indian history and sport. It was a proud moment for me from being the quizzer to building a quiz master. As I began a career in IT, I wanted to remain in this intersection between knowledge, questions and technology. That's why I veered into data science and database implementation. With the advent of smartphones and user experience, machines were starting to get "smarter". They could predict answers, pickup trends and learn new behaviour. I wanted to learn the incredible math and tech that facilitated the learning. From Quizzes to knowledge bases to smarter machines, my journey began at a point of learning the answers from machines, to trying to make machines learn from us. That is why today I am pursuing a masters degree in computer science, with a focus on machine learning and data science. That is the medici effect and intersection of diverse fields in my life.