# Data is not the new oil say Prof Sir Nigel Shadbolt and Sir Tim Berners–Lee

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Sir Nigel Shadbolt and Sir Tim Berners-Lee don't believe that the old adage 'data is the new oil' holds water. In fact, they see data as part of the digital infrastructure much like water and utility companies are part of the physical infrastructure.

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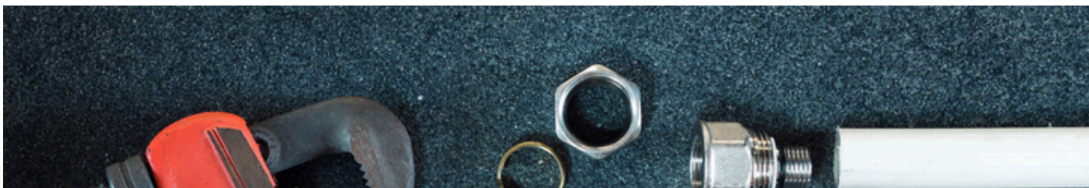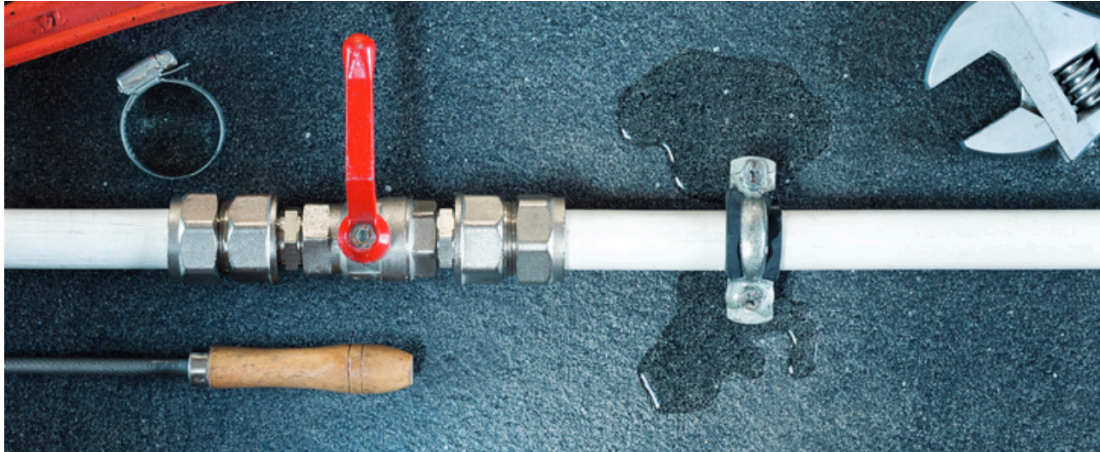
Sir Tim made the valid point that oil is a physical and tangible product, the value of which can be only beneficial to the originator one time. In contrast, data is intangible and reproducible, and the originator of it can reap value from it several times over.

He said: "Instead of talking about the value of data as though it were oil, we talk about the rights to it. I should have the right to have my data because it is a human right. I should have the ability to be able to do things with it." One of those things, if he so chose, would be to put his data into a hospital system, have his genome sequenced and make that data available to the research world to be part of a study.

If someone were to steal that data, his rights would be abused and he should be protected from this by regulations. Sir Tim added: "So framing the whole thing as talking about rights, about my right, we can declare in the UK, 'I should have the right for my DNA data never to be used to select me for a job, for example. Or affect my health insurance premium'."

With reference to this, Sir Nigel said that this notion of a person having an interest in the data they generate relates to a phrase often used in continental Europe; information self-determination. He said that this idea of information self-determination is coming through in conversations and there should be a better balance of interests. But exactly what that balance will look like will vary depending on different jurisdictions, whether they be the West Coast of the US, Europe or the Far East.

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Sir Nigel concluded: "Certainly our view is that individuals should certainly be more empowered around their data and not simply the targets of algorithms, they know not what and they know what for what purpose."

Currently, users of the world wide web which was invented by Sir Tim at CERN in 1989, are the targets of algorithms and subject to microtargeting. In light of this, the recipients of the DataIQ Lifetime Achievement Award 2017 Sir Tim and Sir Nigel, a leading AI researcher at the University of Oxford, support the call for a moratorium on online political and issue-based advertising on social platforms in the period preceding the UK general election on 12th December.

Eleven researchers, technologists, digital rights defenders and concerned internet users, including the CEO of the ODI Jeni Tennison, wrote an **open letter** to Facebook and Google calling for the pause to microtargeted online advertising because in the month until the election no regulation can be passed in time to protect net users from the harmful effects of it.

Sir Nigel pointed out that precedents have been set for such a moratorium. Two weeks before the referendum on abortion in Ireland, Google suspended all issue-based advertising on that topic. And in Canada and Israel, there was a blanket ban on political ads during the election period.

Whilst it is encouraging to see that Twitter has banned all political ads on its platform, it is very disappointing to know that Facebook created an exemption for political adverts from its policy banning false claims.

Sir Tim said: "What you have to do is go ahead and do the right thing quickly, in the short term particularly when you have urgency, for example, an election coming up."

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