

Digital Reality in Apocalypse

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A K Ziauddin Ahmed

Sometimes, archeologists find ancient inscriptions on tablets, walls, leather, etc. written in long-lost languages. Researchers try to decipher those unknown symbols and peek into the past – the lives and events of people who once thrived on the earth.

Old documents, letters, pictures, and cards from a few generations back bring up history and nostalgia. We can touch them, and view them. But now we have arrived at a digital age. Now, we commonly write on computers, tablets, and smartphones, instead of writing on papers. Our writings are preserved in electronic form on storage devices that cannot be accessed without using proper gadgets.

Sometimes, they are stored in the cloud – in data centers somewhere in the world that we do not even know. Our greeting cards and pictures have all become digital. We view them on electronic screens and send or receive them over the internet. Of course, these developments have some advantages and disadvantages.

Take the example of letters. Even with today's fast transportation by aircraft, a letter to a loved one living in a distant country will still take several days to reach. But an email reaches its recipient almost instantly. However, there is a trade-off. Consider this scenario in the future: a girl is reminiscing about her grandfather and telling a friend how knowledgeable and humorous he was.

Unlike our times, she cannot show her friend his handwritten letters. Instead, she shows her his emails. But those are just typed words. They lack the uniqueness of handwritten letters – everyone's grandfather's emails would look alike, and some could even be composed by AI! Thus, the digital future will have to let go of personal touch and authenticity.

Technology is fast changing and new technology is quickly becoming obsolete. In the last few decades, storage technology has evolved from tapes to discs to SSDs. Retrieving data from each type of storage requires specific devices. A cassette tape cannot be played on a CD player and an SSD cannot be run without a computer.

Invented in 1971, floppy disks, portable storage devices, were essential equipment for computer users. However, with the arrival of external hard drives and USB flash drives, they have become extinct. Today's young people may not even recognise them and the old floppy disks cannot be accessed either, because the disk drives required to read them are nowhere to be found. This has happened only in a time gap of around half a century.

In this digital age, we are storing everything in electronic form which is intangible and inaccessible without specific devices. We still produce some hard copies of books, newspapers, documents, and communication. But it can easily be predicted that soon they will all succumb to the ultimate world of soft copies only. Currently, the storage life of data on devices such as CDs, USBs, or SSDs is limited to around 100 years. Therefore, if there were an apocalyptic destruction of our civilisation, all our writings, audio, and videos may vanish forever.

If a nuclear war wipes out our civilisation today, a thousand years later, our history will not be there, there will be no trace of how we lived, what we thought, and what we accomplished. If in that remote future somebody accidentally finds a USB stick or an SSD after excavating the Earth, in all probability, they will not have an idea of what it is. Also, the data on it will either be lost or corrupted even if it is not physically damaged.

The Ukraine war, conflicts in the Middle East, and the Taiwan crisis— all are making the world turbulent and volatile. At any moment, things could spiral out of control, leading to an Armageddon scenario and the apocalyptic destruction of civilization.

According to news reports, Mark Zuckerberg is building a 5,000-sq-ft underground shelter on the Hawaiian island of Kauai. Many other billionaires are thought to be building similar shelters in secrecy. A good number of companies have emerged to meet the demand for billionaires' doomsday shelters. For example, US-based Rising S Co. has declared that they have built 14 bunkers in New Zealand, and a Czech company Oppidum advertises that they specialize in building ultra-luxury bunkers.

Zuckerberg and other billionaires live in the sphere of people whose decisions can change the fate of the world. So, their doomsday preparation means the apocalypse is very much on the cards. But how long would they survive in their luxury bunkers? Then, their energy sources will run out and the next generations will be on the same boat as the few ordinary survivors.

As time passes, the memory of civilisation will wane and distort over generations. Facts of the past like the existence of electricity, aircraft, computers, space missions, etc. will turn into myths and legends. The Stone Age will begin all over again.

The writer is a former corporate professional and academic