

Don Tapscott's Prosperity in the Digital Age

Speaker:

- ◆ Don Tapscott, CEO of the Tapscott Group and author of The Digital Economy

Andrew Stone, Reporter

Don Tapscott, CEO of the Tapscott Group, addressed the 2015 World Knowledge Forum on the "Prosperity in the Digital Age." Mr. Tapscott referenced many of the predictions he made about the Internet in his 1995 bestseller The Digital Economy. Though he was somewhat pessimistic about the current state of what he calls the First Era of the Internet, he was optimistic about what new technology could bring in the Second Era of the Internet.

The first prediction Mr. Tapscott made in his bestseller was that the Internet could displace current labor markets and that old industries and jobs would disappear. Mr. Tapscott said that we had told children in the past that if they worked hard they could succeed and be prosperous.

"I won't say we lied, but it's a promise that is broken," he said, expressing the unfortunate fact that jobs are being displaced because of the Internet.

Mr. Tapscott had also predicted in his book that the Internet could bring about a loss of privacy, something which he believes is happening.

"As we go through life, we leave a trail of digital bread crumbs," Mr. Tapscott said, saying that technology companies take our data and create a digital version of people.

He also questioned how the Internet would change democracy in his book. Again, he does not think it has improved it, especially when it comes to media.

"There is a fragmentation of public discourse," he said, believing that most people only pay attention to news media they agree with. "We end up in a self-reinforcing echo-chamber."

Mr. Tapscott then shifted to what he sees as the next era of the Internet.

"I am convinced that the next generation of the Internet is based on the underlying technology of the bitcoin," he said. This underlying technology is called Blockchain.

"It is at the heart of the next 40 years of the Internet," Mr. Tapscott predicted, adding, "In five to ten years, the financial services industry will be unrecognizable," because of the use of Blockchain. It is also the topic of his upcoming book, The Trust Protocol.

As Mr. Tapscott put it, Blockchain is a global ledger of everything that is authenticated by a mass community of users. This ledger will be constantly updated and could provide a platform for trusted transactions. He believes the application of this technology will revolutionize things like land registries, how money is transferred, and the surveillance system. Mr. Tapscott also believes the technology could be applied to companies like Uber and Airbnb. It will allow people to take back their privacy and data, he insisted, "So that if I can monetize it instead of some corporation, I am able to."

Looking forward, Mr. Tapscott is hopeful that technologies like Blockchain can help set a new social contract for the digital age.

“Technology does not create prosperity. People do,” he said. While he seems hopeful about the future, there are no guarantees.

“It’s a time of great promise and great peril,” he said. “And whether or not the promise or peril succeeds depends on you.”