How to See the Future

What technology that exists today has the ability to upend the way things are done a decade from now?

The ability to identify this is correlated with ability to predict the future.

A lot of people attempt to predict the future by going to the edge of technology and imagine changes brought by inventions that don't yet exist. "*Once AI is able to do X, it will change Y in the following ways*" kinds of predictions are very unlikely to be accurate. There are too many variables.

Instead, find technologies that actually exist and work well today, but very few people realize or use them yet. Not because of a fundamental limitation of the tech, but because the knowledge of it and human skill able to use it aren't yet widespread. Then you eliminate the biggest variables around the if, when, and how of the new tech. You can focus on the implications and industries affected.

There are other factors beyond just technology, like trends, norms, beliefs, politics and culture. But those are also more variable and less able to be pinned on a timeline than technology. They affect each other, but new tech, if it makes people's lives easier, is very hard to bet against over a long enough time horizon. People want more for less. Once they've tasted it, they want more of it, and to sell it and take it to its limit. Any tech that can do more with less is highly likely to shape the future, and cultural narratives tend to bend around it.

It's easy to assume any useful tech in existence is already being fully exploited. This is the theoretical economist trap. If you understand and appreciate the power of markets and human self-interest, it can be hard to understand just how unevenly capital and knowledge are distributed at all times, and how much room for innovation always exists. Not just tech innovation, but business model innovation that can deploy existing tech that is underutilized.

There is tons of this all around us all the time. Tech that works wonders but is in "deceptive mode", relegated to small circles of hobbyists, or weird applications that under-exploit its potential.

I think bitcoin fits into this category.

Bitcoin as it was invented and released to the public over a decade ago does a few things that have staggering potential. The ability to attach monetary value to the transfer of information, and do so at levels as small as a 1000th of a penny instantly and globally is

incredibly massive. To do this with no trusted third party or single data repository is even more massive. This is all possible right now today with no need for any new inventions. Hardly anyone knows it.

Instead, most people imagine a future for bitcoin where it becomes gold, then currency, but only if something new gets invented. Most people think bitcoin can't operate at scale and can't handle tiny payments. They are trying to predict the future based on stuff that still needs to be invented. Too many variables to be accurate. That's because what's become known as bitcoin – BTC – stripped out all the functions bitcoin was designed with that let it scale and handle tiny payments instantly. So BTC has to try to solve that all over again and hasn't yet.

Meanwhile, what bitcoin originally was is still operational and working today. It's under the ticker BSV and almost nobody realizes how well it works, and those who have heard of it hate it for personal, cultural, and political reasons. Right now, today, it is doing transactions instantly and globally for 1000ths of pennies as it was designed to do. Nothing new needs to be invented for it to work.

Whether BSV or something else like it, the cat is out of the bag. Current tech right now today can do this. That means the best way to predict the future is to imagine what instant global monetary transactions tied to bits of information from 1000ths of a penny to billions of dollars means. Think through every industry and application. Consider what is not possible today that this makes possible.

Sure, some current businesses will get more efficient. But the real power of prediction comes from finding things that are literally impossible without this tech that only become possible with it. An entirely new model for the internet could emerge. Problems with the information age currently being solved in frustrating, ham-fisted ways (free use, sell user data; trusted third parties; etc.) could be solved in straight-forward efficient ways.

The tech is here. The knowledge and skill and application is not. In ten years, what will be built on it? That's how to see the future.