

## **Case Study: Inappropriate Use of Surveys**

The surveys are no stranger to military intelligence; they have been long used to collect information, generate a certain course of action of the consumer, and even form an opinion. Nevertheless, this also can be used unethically as revealed in the case of Cambridge Analytica and the results of such survey may lead to serious social, legal and ethical ramifications. The case study provided will analyse the 2018 Cambridge Analytica scandal in which the company had accessed and transferred the data of millions of Facebook users collected in surveys.

### **Cambridge Analytica: The Scandal**

In 2018, it became apparent that Cambridge Analytica, a political consultancy company, had participated in one of the most substantial data privacy tantamounts in recent historical past. The company could access personal data of millions of Facebook users, this aspect was mostly enabled by a questionnaire app which sounds harmless and is named, This Is Your Digital Life. The creator of the app Aleksandr Kogan indicated it as a tool to gather data and use it in academics. Users were invited to participate in a personality exam that was expected to explore their mental characteristics. Nevertheless, the application was not made to help in personality assessment only. It gathered a lot of data both on people who have taken the survey and their Facebook friends even without their permission. Most of the sensitive personal data accessed using the app was on likes, political affiliations and other behavioural patterns (Gregg et al., 2022).

### **The Use of Surveys for Monetary Gain**

The case of Cambridge Analytica is probably the most visible one when surveys were used to collect and exploit personal data and gain monetary and political advantages. Whereas most surveys aim at gathering consumer input or product enhancement some pensively designed the

survey to steal, in this case to illegitimately gather valuable data without the cognizance of its users. This information that gained the potential to be capitalized was sold to the political campaigns and other entities posing the ethical concerns related to the surveys. The main problem regarding this point is that the survey actually misled users under the pretext of academic research to provide their more personal information than they anticipated (Jafarzadeh et al., 2021). Another issue that can be gleaned out of this breach, which targeted millions of Facebook users, is that many of such users were not aware that they were being data-mined, thereby illustrating how surveys can be tilted to order results, which are not within the scope of the survey.

### **Survey Abuse in Other Situations**

Although the Cambridge Analytica scandal is the most obvious one, unexampled use of surveys is not limited to political manipulation. There are numerous numbers of areas where people undertake it regularly using surveys to access personal information without their consent. To illustrate, in 2019, the national health service (NHS) in the UK was lamented to have used an online survey to collect sensitive health information on patients. NHS survey required more information on medical history and though it was intended in evaluation of the health of people, it did not do it justice by providing sufficient information on how and where the user data would be used (Ahmed, 2025). In this instance, it was feared that confidentiality of data would not be guaranteed and the data may end up being used by third parties. One more example is the case of 2020 when some online resources surveyed clients about their social media preferences and sold this data to the advertisers without the agreement with the participants.

## **Ethical Implications**

The moral issues on the topic of inappropriate use of surveys are huge and complex. Probably the most important ethical issue in the case of Cambridge Analytica is the breach of user consent. They made users think they are performing a harmless personality test, when in fact they were being farmed of their personal information that was being misappropriated and used without their consent (Reiners, 2022). Such non-disclosure and non-consent is a compromise to the ethical principles of autonomy, which focuses on an individual right to manage personal information. Besides the consent, there is also another ethical issue which is manipulation of data in order to shape behavior. The fact that Cambridge Analytica was using psychographic data to convince voters during the 2016 US elections has cast doubts on whether or not personal data are morally used to influence political results.

## **Social Impacts**

Improper use of the surveys to collect data may have radical social consequences. Trust erosion between people and organisations is one of the major issues. Individuals having personal information gathered without their permission and utilised it in a certain set of circumstances can develop a feeling of violation and mistrust of not only the organisations in question, but of the data collection system as a whole. As it happened to Cambridge Analytica, millions of individuals felt violated because their data was used to influence their political beliefs (Bouza García & Oleart, 2024). This abuse of trust did not only hurt the individual users but also had more general effects upon the political arena, altering popular opinion in a manner that might not have been deemed as ethically correct. The effects of wrong surveys are also socially spread. Using personal data improperly cause the loss of popularity of the government, academic researchers, and businesses among the population that are basing their institution on surveys.

## **Legal and Professional Considerations**

In legal terms, surveys used with unethical intentions are in contravention of numerous privacy and data protection Acts. In the situation with Cambridge Analytica, the corporation had broken the law of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) law of the European Union concerning the strict regulation of the treatment, storage, and information sharing of personal information. Abusive practices of gathering and distribution of user information to political and commerce ends were not only a violation of privacy legislation but also a major source of law defect to businesses such as Facebook. Furthermore, the existing data privacy laws in most of the countries including the US are meant to guard individuals against illegal accumulation of data. Both Cambridge Analytica and Facebook dis-regulated the privacy of their user data and did not properly warn the users about it being used, which prompted the filing of suits against these companies, as well as governmental fines and negative publicity.

## **Conclusion**

With such survey misuse cases as the Cambridge Analytica scandal, there are significant concerns about the privacy of data, its consent, and acceptable actions concerning data collection. Surveys are no doubt an effective method of acquiring information but at the same time may be used politically, commercially and personal advantage and at no time with the consent of the participants being in the open. It can be shown, therefore, that this case brings about the necessity of implementing more ethical considerations, more transparency, and more legal protection of the information of individuals to make sure that the surveys are utilized in a responsible manner.

## References

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