

# Case Study: Inappropriate Use of Surveys

## 1. The Cambridge Analytica Scandal (2018)

In 2018, The New York Times and The Observer uncovered the information of nearly 87 million Facebook users was harvested without consent by the political consulting firm Cambridge Analytica (Calof, 2019). The firm collected this information through seemingly innocuous personality quizzes and surveys posted on Facebook. Users who completed this personality quizzes enabled the retrieval of not just their own data, but also data belonging to their friends. This information was later utilized for political advertisement and profiling during major elections such as the US presidential election and Brexit referendum.

### Key issues:

- Participants giving no consent alongside being unaware of the incredible harvesting of data gives Cambridge Analytica the right to use this information.
- Facebook and its users have now reached a point where latent promises made by the company have been broken.
- Political micro-targeting using collected information from surveys and quizzes.
- Harvesting data without appropriate reimbursement or permission.

## 2. Example 2: TikTok Personality Tests (Ongoing)

More than one report has drawn attention to third-party quiz apps on TikTok and other social media platforms that collect personal data through quizzes and personality tests. Although these said quizzes are labelled to be harmless, they often ask for access to user profile information, contacts, and even device data. Certain developers have been reported selling this information to ad agencies or data brokers without fully informing users.

### Key issues:

- Privacy policies that are not transparent — the users, willingly or unwillingly, do not understand what information is collected nor how it is utilized.
- Abuse of young people — TikTok's younger demographic draws a lot of exploitation.
- Residual risks of targeted advertising, misuse of information, or even political profiling.

## 3. Example 3: Phishing Surveys via Email

Fraudsters often disguise themselves as representatives of well-respected organizations such as banks, airlines, or retailers, and send fake surveys as emails. To sweeten the deal, they may promise gift cards to entice individuals into giving personal details, login credentials, or even credit card info. This activity is what is termed as survey phishing.

### Key issues:

- **Security threats** — victims may lose money as a result of fraud.
- **Brand impersonation** – when scammers impersonate brands, it damages genuine trust.
- These actions generally break the law when it comes to data protection.

### 4. Impacts and Analysis

Perspective	Impacts
<b>Ethical</b>	Misuse of surveys violates the principle of <b>informed consent, transparency, and beneficence</b> — harming individuals for profit.
<b>Social</b>	These cases erode public trust in digital platforms, surveys, and research in general. They can distort public discourse (e.g., election influence) and deepen social divides.
<b>Legal</b>	Breaches of data protection laws (GDPR in Europe, CCPA in California) lead to large fines and lawsuits. Companies like Facebook have faced billions in penalties.
<b>Professional</b>	Violations go against the professional standards of researchers, marketers, and data analysts. They damage the reputation of entire industries and highlight the need for <b>ethical codes of conduct</b> and better oversight.

### 5. Conclusion

These examples demonstrate how the misuse of surveys can result in their exploitation, manipulation, or even criminal use. Dealing with information in an ethical, open, and legal manner is critical for researchers, for organisations, and also for tech platforms. Surveys that are malicious in nature need to be taught to users so that their data can be kept private.

### References:

Confessore, N., 2018. *Cambridge Analytica and Facebook: The Scandal and the Fallout So Far*. The New York Times, [online] 4 April. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/04/us/politics/cambridge-analytica-scandal-fallout.html>

Information Commissioner's Office (ICO), 2018. *Investigation into the use of data analytics in political campaigns*. [pdf] Wilmslow: ICO. Available at: <https://ico.org.uk/media/action-weve-taken/2259371/investigation-into-data-analytics-for-political-purposes.pdf>

BBC News, 2021. *How TikTok collects data through quizzes*. [online] BBC News, 30 April. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-56933733>