

## e-Portfolio Activity: Reflective Activity 2 – Inappropriate

### Use of Surveys

#### Case Study: Cambridge Analytica and Facebook (2018)

In 2018, the Cambridge Analytica scandal shocked the world when it was revealed that the firm had harvested personal data from over 87 million Facebook users without their consent, under the guise of a personality quiz called "This Is Your Digital Life"

(Confessore, 2018). Though only about 270,000 users consented to take the quiz, the app gained access to their friends' data due to Facebook's API permissions at the time.

Cambridge Analytica used this data to build psychographic profiles to influence voting behavior, particularly during the 2016 US presidential election and the UK's Brexit referendum. The surveys were not just for research—they were a tool for micro-targeting political ads, raising deep ethical concerns.

#### Example 2: TikTok's 'Personality Quizzes' and Data Mining (2020–2023)

Numerous "What Disney character are you?" or "Which celebrity is your twin?" quizzes on TikTok and third-party platforms have been found to collect users' name, gender, facial recognition data, and even location metadata. These surveys, often linked to

external apps, harvest data for unclear purposes, including targeted advertising or third-party sharing—without full informed consent.

### Example 3: Mobile Health Surveys Misused in COVID-19 Apps (2020)

During the COVID-19 pandemic, several governments and health apps deployed symptom-checker surveys to collect public health data. However, investigations found that some third-party apps (e.g. COVID-19 Tracker clones) used the data for commercial purposes, including selling it to marketing firms or insurers—violating data protection regulations and user trust.

### Ethical, Legal, Social, and Professional Reflections

Dimension	Impact / Reflection
Ethical	These cases highlight a <b>breach of informed consent, misleading intent</b> , and manipulation of user trust. Ethical guidelines such as the <b>ACM Code of Ethics</b> and <b>BCS Code of Conduct</b> clearly stress the obligation to be honest, respect privacy, and not misuse computing for personal or political gain.
Legal	Cambridge Analytica led to Facebook being fined <b>\$5 billion</b> by the FTC (USA) and <b>£500,000</b> by the UK's ICO. Similar breaches today could result in stronger enforcement under <b>GDPR</b> and <b>Data Protection Acts</b> .

Dimension	Impact / Reflection
<b>Social</b>	Public trust in technology platforms has eroded. These incidents contribute to increased <b>digital skepticism</b> , particularly around elections, health, and mental well-being.
<b>Professional</b>	For computing professionals, these cases underscore the importance of <b>transparency in data collection, clear user consent, and compliance with codes of practice</b> . It also illustrates how unethical data practices can cause <b>long-term reputational damage</b> .

## Conclusion

Surveys, although seemingly harmless, can be powerful tools for manipulation when deployed unethically. The Cambridge Analytica case and more recent examples remind us that ethical computing requires not only technical competence but also integrity, accountability, and respect for user autonomy.

## References

1. Confessore, N. (2018). Cambridge Analytica and Facebook: The Scandal and the Fallout So Far. The New York Times.
2. ACM (2018). Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct. Association for Computing Machinery.
3. BCS (2019). Code of Conduct. British Computer Society.
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5. FTC (2019). Facebook to Pay \ \$5 Billion Fine for Privacy Violations.