

Case Study: Inappropriate Use of Surveys

Cambridge Analytica and the Facebook Data Scandal

The Cambridge Analytica case exemplifies the unethical use of surveys and data analytics for personal and political gains. In 2018, it was revealed that the firm had accessed the personal data of millions of Facebook users under the guise of personality quizzes, which many users completed voluntarily. However, these surveys not only collected data from participants but also harvested information from their social networks without explicit consent (Confessore, 2018). This data was later used to develop psychographic profiles for targeted political advertising, influencing election outcomes in both the UK and the US.

The misuse of surveys in this case highlights several key issues:

Ethical Concerns

Cambridge Analytica's methods violated principles of informed consent and transparency. Users were unaware their data would be used for purposes other than the stated intent of the surveys, representing a breach of ethical standards (Voigt & Bussche, 2017).

Social Implications

The targeted advertisements based on psychographic profiling amplified societal divisions, spreading misinformation and polarizing public opinion. This highlights the dangers of using survey data to manipulate individuals for political purposes (Floridi, 2016).

Legal Implications

The incident violated data protection laws, such as the EU's GDPR, which requires explicit consent for data collection and processing. As a result, Facebook

faced significant legal and financial penalties, including a \$5 billion fine imposed by the US Federal Trade Commission (FTC, 2019).

Professional Misconduct

The professionals involved in designing and implementing these surveys disregarded their responsibility to uphold ethical standards in data collection and analysis, tarnishing the reputation of data science as a field (ACM, 2018).

Other Examples of Inappropriate Survey Use

Google Street View Data Scandal

In 2010, Google admitted that its Street View cars had inadvertently collected personal data, such as emails and passwords, from unprotected Wi-Fi networks while mapping streets. Although the data collection was not survey-based, it parallels the Cambridge Analytica case in terms of exploiting user data without consent (Richards & King, 2014). This breach raised concerns about corporate transparency and accountability.

Targeted Health Surveys

Some health-related surveys conducted by private insurance companies have been criticized for using respondents' health data to adjust premiums or deny coverage. Such practices disproportionately affect vulnerable populations, raising issues of equity and fairness in healthcare access (Williamson, 2017).

Ethical, Social, Legal, and Professional Impacts

Ethical Impacts

The exploitation of survey data undermines public trust in research and data-driven technologies. Ethical guidelines, such as the principles outlined by the

British Computer Society (BCS, 2022), emphasize the need for transparency, consent, and respect for user privacy.

Social Impacts

Inappropriate use of surveys exacerbates inequalities, reinforces biases, and manipulates public opinion. Such practices contribute to a digital divide, where marginalized communities face disproportionate harm (Selwyn, 2020).

Legal Impacts

Regulatory frameworks like the GDPR and the California Consumer Privacy Act (CCPA) have introduced stricter data protection measures. However, inconsistent enforcement and loopholes still allow unethical practices to persist (Voigt & Bussche, 2017).

Professional Impacts

Data scientists and researchers bear the responsibility of adhering to ethical standards, ensuring their work does not harm individuals or society. The ACM Code of Ethics (2018) underscores the importance of professional integrity and accountability in computing practices.

Recommendations

Strengthening Regulations

Governments and regulatory bodies must enforce stricter compliance with data protection laws and hold organizations accountable for breaches.

Ethics Training

Incorporating ethics training into academic curricula and professional certification programs can equip data professionals with the tools to navigate ethical dilemmas effectively (Floridi, 2016).

Transparency and Consent

Organizations must adopt transparent data practices, ensuring users are fully informed about how their data will be used.

Public Awareness Campaigns

Educating the public about data privacy and the risks associated with surveys can empower individuals to make informed decisions.

Conclusion

The inappropriate use of surveys, as exemplified by the Cambridge Analytica scandal, underscores the need for robust ethical, legal, and professional standards in data collection and analysis. By prioritizing transparency, accountability, and user empowerment, stakeholders can ensure the responsible use of survey data to benefit society.

References

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