Brexit, fake-news and Facebook

Are they linked each other?

Barcan Vladut, Martarelli Tommaso, Mosca Matteo, Mandolini Mirco

Index

- [What is considered "fake-news"?](#)

- [Facebook's Datagate.](#)

- [Brexit and its links with fake-news and Facebook.](#)

- [Should we worry?](#)

What is "fake-news"?

According to the Collins English Dictionary, where the term "fake-news" was nominated as Word of the Year 2017, fake-news is "a poorly-defined and misleading term that conflates a variety of false information, from genuine error through to foreign interference in democratic processes"

There are many "flavors" of fake-news but the main ones are the following:

- Clickbait, found in news websites or on platforms like Youtube or Instagram

- Satire, jokes or hoaxes, which have the sole purpose of making fun of and criticizing something therefore it has no malicious intentions, even though some people believe in this type of "news"

- Propaganda, often used by countries with dictatorial regimes that use propaganda to spread their truth by obscuring the real one.

Why do we fall for fake-news?

Fake news is designed to make lies appear true, making it very difficult to distinguish them from genuine news.

Furthermore, due to our human nature of blindly believing the best and worst of events and our "laziness" in not checking sources.

Fake news Is created to manipulate our emotions and fears.

What are the dangers of fake-news?

Fake news can bring serious dangers to our everyday life, because of them we'll make decisions about our health or our political orientation that are influenced by real lies fabricated by individuals or companies to gain notoriety and/or money.

Also, fake news is a big danger for democracy and to efficient governance because it can alter the public opinion of a nation and can be a tool for extreme political views like xenofobia on antisemitism.

What happened to Facebook in 2018?

In early 2018, it became public knowledge that all users may have been exposed to having their personal data from their Facebook profile harvested by firms ,where they would use the data to help develop profiles of voters or potential voters, in order to target misinformation for those voters. This is because the terms of usage of Facebook, like those for most social media platforms, requires you to agree to sharing your information.

How did that happen?

A researcher built a Facebook personality quiz, which required participants to download an app and part of the quiz required users to give him access to their friends' data. A little over a quarter-of-a-million people used the application, which gave the researcher access to around 50 million profiles, and the researcher then turned over the information to firms such as Cambridge Analytical, where they used the data to build profiles for political research.
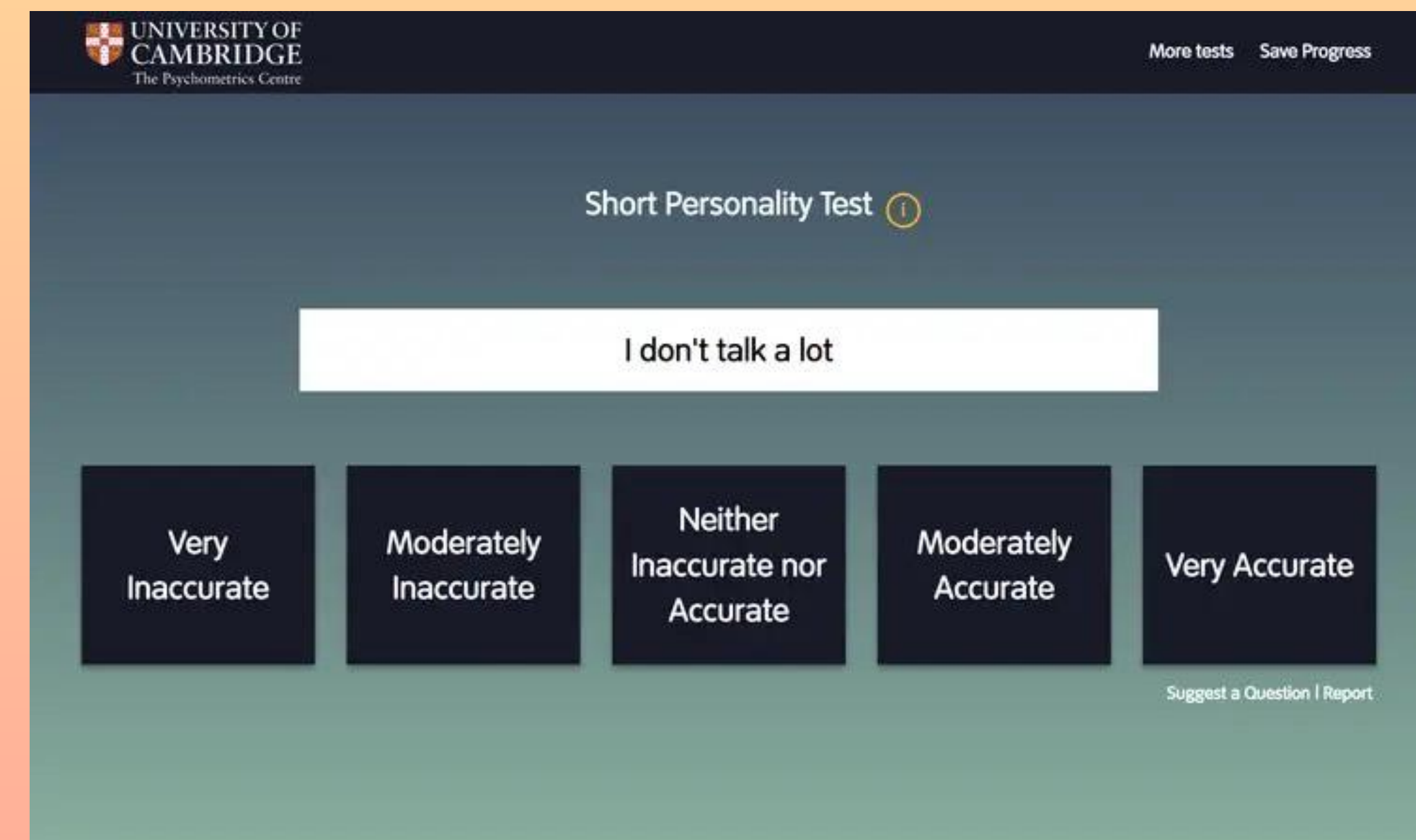
How did Facebook defend itself?

Although the case is classified as a "data breach", Facebook does not characterize it as a data breach, because they do not believe that this "data harvest" violated the user terms that all users agree to for Facebook and they insist that all users of the application consented to the use, despite the fact that the U.K. firm Cambridge Analytical obtained information about 50 million Facebook users without their knowledge.

How does all of this link to Brexit?

During the Brexit referendum campaigns, Facebook played a crucial role in influencing voters across the UK, where the outcome of the vote was a result of stipulated efforts to influence voters' opinions using personalized ads.

The Vote Leave Campaign team worked hard to push certain narratives that would get them more votes during the referendum. They were able to do this by using the services of Cambridge Analytica, which collected information about voters from Facebook using the personality test that we talked about before. Then they used the information that they gathered to target the voters with ads filled with hoaxes and lies that appealed to their concerns.

How did that influence the vote?

The pro-Brexit party stated that the UK didn't had any advantages in remaining in the EU and slogans such as "Taking Back Control" suggest that some people in the UK did not feel as part of the EU and they felt that they were not benefitting from the EU and should therefore exit and be on their own. That is despite all the efforts of the EU to develop the UK through various projects.

Brexit would therefore have a huge impact on the ordinary people in the UK as it affects them directly, where most people only voted based on the ads that were coming through their newsfeed on Facebook. However, they failed to consider what the EU had done for them, which was very evident based on the different projects funded by the EU across UK.

Did Facebook help Cambridge Analytics?

The reactions by Facebook show that they were aware of the activities of Cambridge Analytica. The company refused to cooperate when asked to provide answers to the issues surrounding Cambridge Analytica and they further threatened to sue to stop the publication of the article detailing the malpractices of Cambridge Analytica on Facebook. The conduct of Mark Zuckerberg further shows that there was knowledge of what was happening and the lack of cooperation from Facebook is an indication of their Knowledge of what Cambridge Analytica was doing.

Should we worry?

Technology has become an important part of human life and although it has many benefits for a lot of people, it also provides a place where people can avoid rules and regulations. Brexit is a perfect example of how people, companies or even countries can manipulate technology and facts to gain an unfair advantage by manipulating the people.

Also, fake news that are being pushed on news publishers or social medias promotes unpleasant narratives, spreads doubt and confusion, affecting democratic decision-making.

Nevertheless, one of the response measures is to educate the audience against this phenomenon, by encouraging critical thinking ad fact-checking of the news.

THE END.