Statement on politics

Psychometrics Centre statement on political use of psychographics

Due to the controversy regarding the alleged use of psychographics, micro-targeting and fake news networks by political campaigns in the USA and Europe, the following clarification is issued on behalf of all current staff, students and members of the University of Cambridge Psychometrics Centre:

SCL, Analytica, GSR, Kogan and Politics

The University of Cambridge Psychometrics Centre has never worked with or in any way collaborated with SCL Elections Group, Cambridge Analytica, Global Science Research or any subsidiaries thereof. We have had no involvement of any kind with the Cruz or Trump campaigns, Leave.EU nor any other political campaigns of any kind anywhere in the world. Furthermore, no political organisations have ever been given permission to view, commercialise or otherwise use any data collected by the myPersonality project, which ran on Facebook between 2007 and 2012. The same is true for data collected by *www.applymagicsauce.com* and *www.discovermyprofile.com*. No app developed by the Psychometrics Centre has ever obtained Facebook profile information from its users' friends.

Aleksandr Kogan is not part of the Psychometrics Centre, has never been employed by the Psychometrics Centre and has not at any point been acting on our behalf nor in our interest. We had no knowledge of the existence of the thisisyourdigitallife app before March 2018. Formal assurances were obtained from Kogan by the University to confirm that no myPersonality data, datasets or models or software (including the Apply Magic Sauce app) created or developed by Drs Stillwell and/or Kosinski or by any other students or staff of the University, or derived from them, have been or will be provided to SCL or used by or for the benefit of SCL.

Our research in the field

The Psychometrics Centre has pioneered the use of computational methods to study online behaviour, and its researchers have published extensively on the interaction between psychological traits and social media behaviour. The ability to predict psychological traits from digital footprints behaviour was first demonstrated by Michal Kosinski, David Stillwell and Thore Graepel in this 2013 PNAS paper. At the time, Michal and David were part of the Centre (PhD student and Research Associate respectively) and Thore Graepel worked at Microsoft Research.

As **our mission** states, we strive to positively address issues of privacy, ethics and diversity in our field in order to protect human rights and advance the cause of fairness and equality in society. We also believe that citizens ought to have the ability to understand what their data says about them. That is why the Psychometrics Centre makes available its own suite of psychological prediction tools via Apply Magic Sauce API. Organisations who access this technology need to be pre-approved by us and are subject to strict legal and ethical provisions, which are supported by adherence to the following principles:

1. Control: Nobody should have predictions made about them without their prior informed consent

2. Transparency: The results of any predictions should be shared with individuals in a clear and understandable format

3. Benefit: Predictions should be used to improve services and provide a clear benefit to users

4. Relevance: It should be clear why the data requested is relevant to the prediction being made

Through this and other initiatives, the Psychometrics Centre will continue to campaign for greater transparency on the part of business, governments and academia regarding how personal data is collected and used. Its members have contributed to the wider debate by publishing **academic papers**, writing **news articles** and speaking at international conferences.

*This statement was first published on March 11, 2017. It was updated on 22 March 2018 to further clarify the situation in light of press coverage of Cambridge Analytica, Global Science Research and Aleksandr Kogan. All of the original content of our 2017 statement remains and has not been edited.

Upcoming events

09 DEC
BPS Certificates of Occupational Test Use, Level A and B (5 days)
Date:
Monday, 9 December, 2019 - 10:00 to Friday, 13 December, 2019 - 14:00

08 JAN
IRT and CAT using Concerto (3 days)
Date:
Wednesday, 8 January, 2020 - 10:00 to Friday, 10 January, 2020 - 17:00

10 MAR
SEM in R workshop (3 or 4 days)
Date:
Tuesday, 10 March, 2020 - 09:30

16 MAR
BPS Certificates of Occupational Test Use
Date:

Monday, 16 March, 2020 - 09:00 to Friday, 20 March, 2020 - 14:00

View all events