

Lewle Sebastian Seneviratne

University of Essex

Research Methods and Professional Practice

Unit 5:

Reflective Activity 2

Case Study: Inappropriate Use of Surveys

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Looking back on each step of the technological revolution linked to shaping social perception, such as the radio, television, the internet, and social media, has reflected how people's engagement in democracy has been influenced by various ethical, social, legal, and professional standpoints. For example, later research on the first televised US presidential debate of John F. Kennedy and Richard Nixon in 1960 suggested that television viewers weighed personality rather than policy, and radio listeners weighed more heavily on the policy (Gershon, 2016).

Today, we may adore the proximity of results from Google search, the comfort of purchasing from Alibaba or Amazon, the easiness of social networking through Facebook and LinkedIn and our Apple devices' Design revolution and elegance. Still, it is a one-way and top-down process for our data, where we are not asked for our input or opinions on our own data (Srinivasan, 2019). The concern is real and critical and is likely to worsen as more individuals and items connect to the internet and the role of Artificial Intelligence systems increases (the European Data Protection Supervisor, 2018).

The development of an app referred to as 'thisisyourdigitallife' by Dr Aleksandr Kogan and his company, Global Science Research (GSR), led to harvesting the data of up to 87 million global Facebook users, such as Facebook profile data of users and their friends' tagged photographs, pages liked, posts on the timelines, news feeds, friend lists and Facebook messages, depending on the privacy settings they had implemented on their Facebook profile. According to Dr Kogan, a Facebook user's answers to the app survey and other information from the user's Facebook profile were then used to build a data model about that individual that could predict how the user was likely to vote (Information Commissioner's Office, 2018).

Then some of these user data were then used by Cambridge Analytica to target voters during the 2016 US Presidential campaign process through an emotional manipulating process appealing to their hopes, neuroses, and fears, as stated by Cambridge Analytica's managing director to an undercover reporter as 'It's no good fighting an election campaign on the facts because actually, it's all about emotion' (Stucke, 2018).

The scandal around Cambridge Analytica and Facebook user data leaves the case open to exploring privacy policies, data use, and factors driving consumer concerns regarding their data for inappropriate use of surveys (Kim & Yemen, 2020). The scandal also threatens personality marketing's potential where personality science is to better match how individuals engage by personality profile and to predict behaviours by personality traits. For example, as stated by Cambridge Analytica's managing director, to a 250 communications executives' audience six weeks before the 2016 US presidential election, instead of serving the same advert to 100 million people, an advert can be personalized to sub-segment individuals by personality and change the creativity of the advert to resonate with how individuals perceive the world (Graves & Matz, 2018). Moreover, even if the Facebook survey-takers did read and accept the terms of the disclosure, their friends did not accept any terms, but the app extracted friends' data without their consent (Information Commissioner's Office, 2018).

The fact statements by representatives of Leave.EU made in 2016, and Senior Cambridge Analytica's staff indicated that Cambridge Analytica had also worked for Leave.EU organization, though the Information Commissioner's Office (2018: 44) concluded that there is no proof of a working relationship between Cambridge

Analytica and Leave.EU organization proceeded beyond the initial phase of four meetings.

Therefore, as Srinivasan (2019) suggested, it is the time to think beyond the wealthy technologists in Silicon Valley and understand the disconnection between designers and users, producers and consumers, and tech elites and the rest of us in the world, where a few tech companies monopolize our data undermining democracy as well as fundamental rights and freedoms (Stucke, 2018).

As the European Data Protection Supervisor (2018) argued, it is the time to think beyond a more democratic internet, where greater cooperation between data protection authorities and other public policy regulators safeguards individuals' rights and interests in the digital society.

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