

CS4320/7320 Software Engineering
Exercise 4.1 - Systems Theory

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Case

Cambridge Analytica's use of fake social media accounts to influence the 2016 presidential vote in the United States of America

Grid

Ethical Quandary	Personal information privacy	Information security	Capacity of servers	Political system	Public opinion	Social fairness
Confidentiality	x	x				
Competence						
Intellectual property rights						
Computer misuse			x			
Deception				x	x	x

Summary

In this case, I think the researchers' behaviors violated some ethical principles and might influence several individual systems. First, through creating fake accounts, researchers deceived the social media users that interact with those accounts. Users might treat these accounts as real humans and thus adjust their opinions or behaviors accordingly. I do not know whether researchers debriefed to the users who saw their fake accounts (I suppose it is almost impossible to realize). If they did not, then the users would not know they were deceived and could not choose to withdraw from the experiment. Besides, the researchers might collect personal information of users who interacted with their fake accounts. Whether the researchers could keep the information confidentially would be a question.

More importantly, their fake accounts might mislead public opinions and create a fake public sphere where voters cannot accurately detect the climate of opinions and make rational decisions accordingly. This might influence the results of the election and might also violate the independence of the political system. Researchers' advanced technology might create an unfair situation for candidates in the election.