Case Study: Inappropriate Use of Surveys

The Cambridge Analytica scandal (Confessore, 2018) is a high-profile example of how surveys can be manipulated to gather personal data for alternative purposes. Cambridge Analytica accessed data from approximately 87 million Facebook users through a personality quiz app even though only 270,000 people took the survey as they also collected data from the participants Facebook friends, they then used this data to build psychological profiles for targeted political ads for the 2016 US presidential election.

Other high-profile examples of companies who have used surveys inappropriately are Target who in 2012 used survey and purchase data to predict customers life events so they could target ads to individuals (Duhigg, 2012) and TikTok who in 2020 used surveys intended to improve UX to collect data about their users for targeted advertising and financial gain (Newton, 2020).

These types of exploitative surveys raise plenty of legal, social and ethical issues for example these companies could be found to be in violation of human rights laws related to informed consent as the victims weren't fully aware of how their data would be used and they could be found to be in breach of privacy laws as at result they could receive a significant fine and suffer significant reputational damage.

References

Confessore, N. (2018) 'Cambridge Analytica and Facebook: The Scandal and the Fallout So Far', *The New York Times*, 4 April. Available at: https://www.nytimes.com/ [Accessed: 29 November 2024].

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