The case study for this unit is the Cambridge Analytica Scandal which involved the personal data of millions of Facebook users being collected by the British firm; Cambridge Analytica, for the use of political advertising without the consent of the users. This presents many issues with the collecting of data from social media websites, with users unaware of this invasion of privacy occurring. It should be further noted that individuals gave access to an application called "thisisyourdigitallife" and this was the source of the data collection. Furthermore, individuals who gave permission inadvertently gave permission on behalf of their friends to be included.

This invasion of privacy has brought to the fore issues which were never encountered prior, or rather so publicly and when compared to the traditional data collection; in person, where their express consent is given, digital data collection becomes much more difficult due to the large population that is under investigation (Schneble et al, 2018). The traditional guidelines were based on medical research where data is anonymized, or scrubbed, and while data from Cambridge Analytica was anonymized and aggregated, individuals could have still been identified.

While the lack of consent of individuals' data being collected is a major issue, the silence of Facebook, in not informing their user base was also staggering due to their ethical responsibility to inform members of their network as to the extent of the issue which occurred, and further to that, Cambridge University was also said to be unaware as to what occurred, which has been widely reported by the media (Schneble et al, 2018).

There were multiple systemic and ethical failures which occurred; the first of which was the lack of transparency for how the data was collected through the use of a third party application, the permissions given on behalf of individuals for their data to be collected and the lack of care that Facebook has for its user base to inform them of their data being distributed. All of these issues highlight the importance of permission for data collection and control and the unethical sharing of data by companies without the user content (Confessore, 2018). This is also a clear violation of the ACM Code of Ethics and Conduct on multiple levels, dealing with honesty and trustworthiness, respecting privacy and honoring confidentiality (ACM, N.D.).

References:

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