

## **Case Study: Inappropriate Use of Surveys (660 words)**

As the Cambridge Analytica scandal unravelled in the public sphere, significant attention was directed towards the big tech companies and the people involved, how much data they own per individual and the impact this data can make (González et al., 2019). On average, however, people appear to lack understanding on the different types of data they generate and how this data, such as click-through and browsing patterns, could be used for targeted advertising (Hinds et al., 2020).

Cambridge Analytica gathered people's data via seemingly innocent personality quizzes and exploited people's lack of awareness on the types of data Facebook shared and with whom, when consenting to partake in such a quiz. Ultimately, this quiz acted as a survey where, when responses were gathered at a mass scale by a 3<sup>rd</sup> party Facebook app, Cambridge Analytica were able to extract a range of demographic and psychosocial attributes that were critical to the effectiveness of certain types of political advertising. The technology by way which this advertising is delivered enabled micro-targeted advertising, which could have subverted political outcomes in a range of events (Berghel, 2018).

The way social media technology was used was unprecedented. In usual academic and professional settings, users are always requested explicit content and they are usually aware who is collecting their data and how it will be used (Kelley et al., 2003). In fact, it is a legal requirement to state this information. Social media has made the conducting of surveys more efficient – a bigger respondent base can be reached, for low or no cost (BBC, n.d.). However, the casual and spontaneous environment of a

social media platform, where users can voluntarily participate in surveys at their own leisure and even get rewarded for participation, has enabled data-harvesting scams to proliferate. A security vendor recently identified a network of cybercriminals that targeted consumers globally with fake consumer surveys, promising a reward upon entering personal details, including credit card numbers (Muncaster, 2021). A machine-learning-powered tool was able to identify over eight thousand websites involved in survey scams (Kharraz et al., 2018). However, it is not just illegitimate companies using surveys irresponsibly. Caribbean Cruise Line was fined more than 500 000 dollars for utilising political survey robocalls to sell a cruise line package, generating substantial profits for the company (FTC, 2015). Users who consented to participate in the survey would receive a “a two-day cruise to the Bahamas”, as advertised by the company. Using the premise of a political survey call, they were able to bypass the do-not-call and robocall rules, which prohibit sales calls, thus violating the Federal Trade Commission's Telemarketing Sales Rule (TSR), which bans deceptive and abusive telemarketing practices. From an ethical standpoint, this case represents a breach of consumer trust through intentional deception. By disguising sales calls as political surveys, the cruise line deliberately misled consumers about the fundamental purpose of the interaction.

A final example is Facebook's survey on use of social media, where users were asked if the company should decide whether adult men could use the social media platform to solicit sexual pictures from children (Hern, 2018). This gathered significant criticism in public, highlighting the platform's role in child exploitation (Paul, 2020). By framing child grooming as a matter of policy preference rather than an inherent moral wrong, Facebook inadvertently normalized predatory behaviour toward children and signalled

a potential tolerance for behaviour that society has firmly rejected. The survey's structure suggested that soliciting sexual images from minors could potentially be acceptable depending on user preferences, presenting what is universally recognised as harmful exploitation as a debatable policy issue. Additionally, from a legal standpoint, by omitting legal considerations from the survey options, Facebook implied that platform policies could supersede legal requirements.

In conclusion, digital technology has enabled proliferation of unethical and irresponsible surveying practices across a range of mediums, particularly social media. It is critical that the usual standards employed in academic and professional practices are adhered to and regulated to an equal extent.

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