**Unit 5 – Reflective activity on a case study on an inappropriate use of surveys**

The case study on the inappropriate use of surveys, focusing on the Cambridge Analytica scandal, highlights a significant ethical breach when collecting and analysing data (Schneble et al., 2018). In 2018, Cambridge Analytica obtained and shared data from millions of Facebook users without their explicit consent (Schneble et al., 2018). The data were gathered via seemingly harmless surveys on Facebook, which many users had participated in without knowing their data would have been used inappropriately (Schneble et al., 2018).

This case study highlights the unethical, deceptive actions of Cambridge Analytica. Users who participated in the surveys were unaware that their personal data, along with their friends' data, were collected and leveraged for targeted political advertising (Schneble et al., 2018). Thus, this breach’s impact spans various ethical, social, legal, and professional standpoints.

From an ethical standpoint, the inappropriate use of surveys by Cambridge Analytica raises concerns about the importance of gaining informed consent and respecting users’ privacy (Kreuter et al., 2020). Users were not adequately informed about how their data would be used, undermining their autonomy and right to control their personal information (Kreuter et al., 2020). This case study demonstrates the need for transparency and clear communication when collecting data via surveys.

Socially, the Cambridge Analytica scandal eroded public trust in social media platforms and highlighted the misuse of personal data and its negative impact on democracy (Baum & Potter, 2019). The manipulation of public opinion via targeted advertising can lead to disastrous consequences, influencing electoral outcomes and undermining the foundations of democracy (Baum & Potter, 2019).

From a legal standpoint, the actions of Cambridge Analytica violated data protection laws in both the United Kingdom and the United States (Hu, 2020). The unauthorized access and use of personal data without informed consent are clear breaches of privacy regulations. This case led to investigations, regulatory changes, and legal consequences, emphasising the importance of upholding data protection laws, and holding organisations legally accountable for their unethical actions (Hu, 2020).

Professionally, the inappropriate use of surveys by Cambridge Analytica raises concerns about the ethical responsibilities of data analysts and researchers (Hinds et al., 2020). Professionals in these fields have a duty to ensure that data collection and analysis adhere to ethical guidelines and respect individuals' rights (Hinds et al., 2020). The case serves as a reminder of the ethical pitfalls in designing and conducting surveys, and the importance of upholding professional standards.

In addition to the Cambridge Analytica case, there are other examples of inappropriate use of surveys that highlight similar ethical, social, legal, and professional implications. A relevant example is the misuse of surveys for marketing purposes without informed consent (Bahabri & Zaidan, 2021). Organisations may collect survey data from individuals under the guise of market research but later use it for targeted advertising, spamming, or selling data to third parties without the participants' knowledge or consent (Bahabri & Zaidan, 2021).

Another example is the use of surveys to manipulate public opinion or advance certain political agendas (McGregor, 2020). Surveys can be designed and conducted in a biased manner to elicit desired responses and influence public perception (McGregor, 2020). This unethical design further undermines democracy, promotes a homogenous, monolithic viewpoint, and can lead to polarisation and social divisions (McGregor, 2020).

The impact of these examples, including the Cambridge Analytica case, underlines the need for robust ethical frameworks, stringent privacy regulations, and greater accountability in data collection and analysis. It calls for increased awareness among individuals regarding the potential risks of participating in surveys and the importance of informed consent. Furthermore, it emphasizes the responsibility of organizations, researchers, and all professionals involved to uphold ethical standards and protect the rights and privacy of survey participants.

**References**

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