

Facebook-Cambridge Analytica Scandal

The legacy of Cambridge Analytica is haunted by the 2014 Facebook-Cambridge Analytica scandal. Cambridge Analytica, a political consulting firm headquartered in London, England, exposed the data of up to 87 million Facebook users (Chang). Cambridge Analytica wanted to target American voters with “hyper-specific appeals” on the internet by using “psychographic microtargeting” by leveraging Facebook data “to understand the personalities of its users and then, in turn, use that information to match advertisements with the people most likely to respond to them” (Resnick). Cambridge Analytica paid Aleksandr Kogan, a Soviet-born researcher at the University of Cambridge, 7 million dollars to develop a Facebook app that would gather the profile information and the “likes” of users on Facebook who downloaded Kogan’s app. The information would then be used to form “voter profiles” from users’ interests and influence the U.S. 2016 presidential election (Chang, “Cambridge”). Moreover, the Facebook-Cambridge Analytica scandal sparked a conversation on the ethics of privacy, data protection of clients, and research techniques within the scope of data analytics in the Big Data community.

As data mining and data analytics have become the key to reaching new horizons in the business world, the increasing demand for big data has been met with the challenge of enforcing ethical codes including biases like racism and sexism, customer transparency of

motives, and customer privacy (Liebert). To analyze the Facebook-Cambridge Analytica scandal, the core values of Catholic Social Teaching (Human Dignity, the Common Good, Subsidiarity, Solidarity, and the Universals Destination of Goods) and four of the ten Benedictine hallmarks (Stability, Community, Hospitality, and Stewardship) will be applied to the case.

The Facebook-Cambridge Analytica case does not display the attributes of Subsidiarity, Solidarity, Stewardship, the Universal Destination of Goods, Stability and Human Dignity. Subsidiarity is the act of empowering individuals through communities by giving them opportunities for their skills to flourish and preserving the community's dignity ("Circles"). While the one violated Facebook policy of the scandal was the third-party sharing of user data when Aleksandr Kogan sold the data to Cambridge Analytica, critics never focused on the impact of the desired analysis of the data. In a small business journal, Inc., Yazin Akkawi aggregates "the biggest takeaway from the Cambridge Analytica scandal" in one sentence: "the scandal illuminates just how easy it is for people to be labeled, categorized, and segmented" (Akkawi). In the late 2000's, Computational Psychologist and Big Data Scientist at the Stanford University and former Deputy Director of the University of Cambridge Psychometrics Centre, Michal Kosinski, developed a model that correlated the Big Five personality types (openness, conscientiousness, extroversion, agreeableness and neuroticism) and Facebook profiles and user likes to human characteristics; Skin color (with 95% accuracy), sexual orientation (85%) , political affiliation (85%) and other qualities can be identified by analyzing the user's profiles while liking Lady Gaga on Facebook was cited as good indicator of extroversion (Grassegger, Akkawi). Likewise, prior to the Facebook-Cambridge Analytica scandal, Kosinski realized the potential and danger of the reverse from his research: "Data can also be used the other way

around to search for specific profiles” and to influence, for example, an undecided Democrat. Consequently, participating in analysis to label, categorize, and segment people and using the information as a “people search engine” impedes empowering individuals and strips the community’s dignity by labeling its individuals.

Similarly, because the undecided Democrat or the swing voter loses a sense of liberty when individuals with substantially more power, like Steven Bannon and Aleksandr Kogan, take advantage of them for personal gain, Solidarity, is not present (“Circles”). To emphasize, solidarity is the bridging of the “social distance” between people by committing oneself to the common good. The nature of the scandal expresses how individuals with political and monetary power can overpower the common man, widening the “social distance.” The process promoted the dehumanization and deindividualization and depressed the human value of voters (Grassegger, Akkawi). “We’re more than just Lady Gaga fans, aren’t we?” (Akkawi).

Stewardship is “a respectful use of resources (tangible and intangible) for the good of all” (“A Foundation”). Ethical leaders are characterized by their responsibility of the usage of resources and frugality. Likewise, Cambridge Analytica’s goal was to target voters in such a way to benefit the Republican party during the election (“Cambridge”). The unauthorized data harvesting from users and “friends” of users without their consent contributed to an advantage of the Republican party and disadvantaged the Democratic Party and smaller political parties like the Green Party, the Libertarian Party or the Independents. Furthermore, the “psychographic microtargeting” performed by Cambridge Analytica would hinder the individual’s ability to vote for the candidate of their choosing prior to the advertisement manipulation (Resnick). By not respecting user’s personal information, Aleksandr Kogan and

Cambridge Analytica both fail to express stewardship when providing the Republican party an unfair advantage.

The Universal Destination of Goods is the equal accessibility and proper use of a good (“Circles”). Exposing users’ personal information to third parties, like Cambridge Analytica and the Trump campaign, negates the Catholic social teaching value of the Universal Destination of Goods because the data is not being used for its proper purpose and is not equally accessible to everyone. It can be argued that data should not be equally accessible to everyone because when data is exposed to those who have bad or unethical intentions, monumental damage, like the breach of privacy for up to 87 million Facebook users, can occur.

Stability is leadership and that engages in “a long-term commitment to the community and the common good” as opposed to “private short-term gain” (“A Foundation”). On the contrary, a “failed ethical leader” is one who only seeks the community’s common good if they will obtain a benefit. One of the criticisms of the Facebook-Cambridge Analytica scandal is that a political consulting firm, Cambridge Analytica, and the Republican party had internal influences during the 2016 Presidential campaign. Steve Bannon, the then future vice-president of Cambridge Analytica, persuaded conservative “megadonors” to fund the Cambridge Analytica. In turn, Bannon later became the campaign manager for the Donald Trump campaign when he “reached out to the Trump campaign to introduce the two sides (Chang).” Additionally, Cambridge Analytica worked for the campaigns of all republicans including Donald Trump, Senator Ted Cruz and Ben Carson, and there is speculation whether the data obtained from the Facebook data breach did influence the outcome of the 2016 Presidential Election. Regardless, the internal influences that Bannon sealed between the Cambridge Analytica and the Republican Party represent the “failed ethical leader” because there was an attempt to disrupt the American

democratic voting system. Bannon's poor ethical judgement to seek donations from a source with a strong conservative political bias and then join a high-ranking position on a Republican presidential campaign trail characterizes Bannon as a leader who sacrificed integrity and the image of an ethical role model to his subordinates, who looked to him as a leader, for influence in the American political system. Steve Bannon prevented a "long-term commitment to the community and the common good" by negatively influencing his mentees with his unethical actions.

The human dignity of a person is the idea that everyone is created in the image and likeness of God. Each person has value and should be treated with respect ("Circles"). Aleksandr Kogan's creation of the Facebook application, a personality quiz called "thisisyourdigitallife," to form "voter profiles," striped users of the user's respect; therefore, the Cambridge-Analytica's actions do not align with the Catholic Social Teaching's standards of human dignity ("Cambridge"). The Facebook users who used Kogan's application were not informed that the information would be used for political profiling and target advertisement that would benefit the Republican party (Bloomberg). Kogan had permission from Facebook to create the app and to gather data from the profiles of the app users and their "friends" if the user's privacy allowed; however, Facebook granted Kogan the rights to harvest the data under the principle that the data was to be used for research purposes only. Also, the user's friends never gave consent to Kogan to access their personal information; The 270,000 users who participated in Kogan's application led to access of 87 million Facebook profiles. Unlike the agreement, Kogan sold the data to Cambridge Analytica to target internet users; nevertheless, the Facebook users accepted a statement of terms and conditions only to later discover that they may

have been one of the 87 million users who had personal data stolen for political gain of the Republican party.

Despite the loss of human dignity for the 87 million Facebook users, the Facebook-Cambridge Analytica scandal helped the common good by raising awareness about privacy and data protection of clients for the Big Data community, businesses and individuals. The definition of the common good encompasses around the idea that a common good is formed when one's growth is seen in the context of the community ("Circles"). An American magazine, The Atlantic, published a survey to learn about their reader's thoughts about social media privacy and trust (Beck). There were 2,218 respondents with some evidence of a skewed test sample; the sample was predominantly "older." Nevertheless, the results concluded that the Facebook-Cambridge Analytica scandal encouraged a change in some of the participants' attitudes on social media. As a reaction to the news of the Facebook-Cambridge Analytica scandal, 9.6 percent of respondents reported to have deleted their Facebook account, 49.1 percent of respondents reported to "change their behavior on Facebook," and 25.6 percent of respondents reported to have "changed their behavior" on social media platforms other than Facebook. Actions of "changed behavior" included "being more careful, or posting less, or changing their privacy settings." Additionally, the Facebook spokesperson acknowledged that even though Facebook has not experienced "any meaningful impact" of Facebook user's behavior after the scandal, "what we have seen is that people now care more about data privacy and understanding the controls and choices they have." Consequently, as more scandals occur concerning the breach of information privacy of an individual, the community's awareness about data protection continues to grow.

In a community, a Benedictine leader is to defend the common good (“A Foundation”). These leaders are characterized by their “commitment to positive organizational change.” In the aftermath of the Facebook-Cambridge Analytica scandal, Mark Zuckerberg, Facebook’s CEO, committed himself to implement changes to the Facebook platform to increase users’ privacy (Segarra). Some of the changes include eliminating profile search ability by phone number or email, restricting third-party access to Facebook event attendees and needing Facebook approval to access private group, and providing users with easy access to terminate the permission of applications to access user data. Zuckerberg commented later in an interview with CNN on his committed involvement to increase user privacy. “I started Facebook, and at the end of the day I’m responsible for what happens on our platform,” Zuckerberg stated (Fiegerman). “We will learn from this experience to secure our platform further and make our community safer for everyone going forward.” Moreover, Zuckerberg’s actions exemplify a leader who committed himself to develop a stronger and safer platform to protect Facebook users against future data breaches.

Finally, Hospitality, which is the “radical openness to ‘the other,’” can carry a negative attribute; however, Hospitality may also carry a positive attribute (“A Foundation”). Data scientists and data analytics interpret data to answer critical questions with numerous world applications like market research. Therefore, it is vital that there is a “radical openness” and truthfulness between the source this is giving their information and the individuals analyzing and mining the data so that the final conclusions are to the highest possible accuracy. However, in the Big Data community, the integrity of the means of conducting the analysis must be preserved which includes the confidentiality of individuals. In the Facebook- Cambridge Analytica scandal, the means of harvesting the data without user consent was unethical. Likewise, the

information gained from tracking Facebook users' "likes" is just as valuable as obtaining customer's credit card information from a store database. The analysis of Hospitality with respect to the Facebook-Cambridge Analytica scandal and the means of conducting research has caused controversy among the individuals of the Big Data community ("Data Analytics").

Reflecting on the Facebook-Cambridge Analytica scandal, I think that even though Cambridge Analytica hired Aleksandr Kogan to harvest personal data for political gain without the consent of the 87 million Facebook users, positive consequences exist. For example, the exposure of the data breach not only tightened Facebook's security measures, but also spread awareness of internet safety to people around the world. Analyzing the Facebook-Cambridge Analytica case with the frameworks of Benedictine hallmarks and Catholic social teaching values, helped me to better understand the implications of using data. Likewise, I believe that in our growing data driven world, it is critical for individuals to be educated about the dangers and consequences data, especially for individuals like myself who want to pursue a career in data analytics.

By analyzing the Facebook-Cambridge Analytica scandal with the core values of *Catholic Social Teaching* (Human Dignity, The Common Good, Subsidiarity, Solidarity, and the Universals Destination of Goods) and four of the *Ten Benedictine Hallmarks* (Stability, Community, Hospitality, and Stewardship), it is evident that the Big Data community is in need of a universal code of ethics especially when extracting data that cross international borders. To emphasize, Gillian Docherty the chief executive of the Scotland's based company, The Data Lab, comments that even though she is a believer that the fast growing data industry can "lead the world to a future where data powers scientific progress, economic prosperity and social good," Cambridge Analytica taught the

Big Data community that they never asked themselves the question, “Should we do it?” as opposed to “Are we capable of doing it?” (Lee). Furthermore, educating people about both the potential of data and the consequences of the wrongful usage of data is critical to ensure that the means of gathering, sharing and analyzing the analysis are following ethical standards. Human dignity, the common good, subsidiarity, solidarity, the universal destination of goods, stability, community, hospitality and stewardship should be the values that are used to develop and implement a universal ethical guideline for the Big Data community so that the integrity of the projects is not harmed and that the projects focus on creating public good.

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