**Reflective Activity 2**

**Case Study: Inappropriate Use of Surveys**

Cambridge Analytica obtained the data of 87 million Facebook users, and was later hired by the Trump campaign to influence targeted voter groups (Confessore, 2018). This was made possible due to a Cambridge University researcher called Aleksandr Kogan, who created a questionnaire using an app, which initially asked respondents to grant access to their Facebook profiles. In 2014, when the incident happened, Facebook had less stringent privacy rules, and so the data from all the participant’s friends’ profiles were also harvested. Before long, the profiles of the Facebook users, including likes and psychological profiles, were in the hands of the Trump presidential campaign, and this data was used to influence voter behaviour.

Surveys have also been used to gain access to personally identifiable information (PII) directly, through means such as phishing. One example was described in a warning from the United States Department of Justice (2021), who gave detail on scammers using surveys to exploit the panic caused by the recent COVID-19 pandemic, and extort money from its victims. The phishing survey arrived by email or text message, and then asked respondents to fill out a series of questions, including a section requesting credit card details so that posting and packaging fees could be taken in order for a prize to be delivered as a reward for taking part.

In this example, the users not only do not receive their reward, they also are extorted for money, and thus were caused harm. Possibly, more importantly, they are offering up their personal data, which could be particularly invasive in such a survey, which likely concerns health data as well as PII. This invades privacy. Phishing is illegal in the UK, for example, under the Computer Misuse Act (1990) and the Fraud Act (2006), and is quite clearly wrong from an ethical and social point of view.

The Cambridge Analytica scandal is largely more complicated. Although what they did was legal, and even inline with their parent company SCL Group’s mission statement which read “Our mission is to create behaviour change through research, data, analytics, and strategy for both domestic and international government clients” (Meyer, 2018), what they did was completely unethical. Furthermore, the director of the company at the time has since been banned from running Limited Liability Companies (LLCs) in Britain after being deemed to have allowed staff to partake it services which were unethical (Shabong & Aripaka, 2020). As a result of the scandal, both the company, and its parent company SCL Group, were forced to close operations due to the negative publicity suffered. Facebook later said they would review how thousands more apps handled data to investigate any further wrongdoing (Wall Street Journal, 2018). However, all parties denied any liability and the case continues (The Guardian, 2018).

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