



# **NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCES & TECHNOLOGY**

**School of Electrical Engineering  
and Computer Science**

**HU222 – Professional Ethics**

**Assignment 1**

CLO-2 (PLO-8, BT Level: C-3)

## **Submission Details**

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## Chosen Case

*“The Ethical Implications of the 2018 Facebook-Cambridge Analytica Data Scandal”*

by The University of Texas at Austin, December, 2019 [\[Link\]](#)

# The Facebook–Cambridge Analytica Data Scandal

## 1 Introduction

In 2018, it became known to the public that personal information of millions of Facebook users was collected without their consent and used for political advertising. This incident sparked widespread debate about data privacy, user rights, and the ethical implications of social media platforms. This report analyzes the scandal through the ethical perspective, identifying stakeholders, ethical principles at stake, and so on.

## 2 Ethical Analysis

### 2.1 Stakeholders

- **Meta (formerly Facebook):** Responsible for user data security, and overall data governance.
- **Cambridge Analytica (Defunct):** Key perpetrator; obtained and improperly used personal data from Facebook users without their informed consent.
- **Users:** Key victims; individuals whose personal data was collected and used without their informed consent.
- **Regulatory Bodies:** Responsible for regulating data privacy, protecting citizens' rights, and enacting rules to ensure responsible data practices.

### 2.2 Ethical Principles at Stake

*Social media presents a complex ethical landscape.* The users have a fundamental right to control their personal data and understand how it's collected, used, and stored (**privacy**). This requires ethical organizations to be upfront about their data practices (**transparency**). Furthermore, users should be empowered to make informed decisions and understand the implications of their choices. This means platforms should obtain clear and unambiguous consent before using user data, and ensure users understand the potential consequences of their choices (**autonomy**). Both social media platforms and regulatory bodies share a social responsibility to prioritize user safety and well-being, and all organizations should be held accountable for their data practices (**accountability**).

### 2.3 Potential Consequences of Different Courses of Action

This section analyzes potential consequences for key stakeholders based on various courses of action. *Note that Cambridge Analytica was not analyzed in the case study as it became defunct soon after the scandal.*

### 2.3.1 Facebook

- **Stricter data controls:** May reduce advertising revenue and insights derived from data but increase users' trust.
- **Transparency:** More transparency is almost always preferred; however, it may reveal past practices and invite legal scrutiny.
- **No action:** Maintains revenue but erodes trust and risks stricter regulations and legal penalties.

### 2.3.2 Governments

- **Stricter data privacy laws:** Protects citizens but may hinder innovation and research.
- **No action:** May encourage further data misuse and erode public trust.

## 3 Key Ethical Considerations

The data scandal under study raises several critical ethical concerns. First, the collection of user data through a disguised personality quiz bypassed the vital principle of **informed consent**. This, coupled with the vast amount of personal information misused, exposes weaknesses in modern-day **data security** and raises serious **privacy** violation concerns. Furthermore, Facebook's initial **lack of transparency** regarding data sharing practices eroded user trust. Beyond privacy, the potential for biased algorithms and targeted advertising to discriminate based on personal data introduces **fairness and discrimination** concerns. Lastly, the scandal revealed that collected data was being used to manipulate **voters in the US elections**, highlighting the immense social responsibility organizations hold in preventing the **spread of misinformation** and its potential to disrupt future elections.

## 4 Evaluation of Alternative Actions

### 4.1 Increasing Strictness of Data Regulatory Laws

- **Strengths:** Enhances user privacy and reduces potential of misuse.
- **Weaknesses:** Hinders advanced innovation and research and requires complex implementation; an ethical dilemma.

### 4.2 Giving Utmost Control to Users

- **Strengths:** Allows for informed consent and increases trust and accountability.
- **Weaknesses:** May overwhelm users with complex choices, require significant platform changes, potential for information overload.

### 4.3 Encourage and Conduct Ethical Impact Assessments

- **Strengths:** Companies should allow independent oversight bodies to conduct regular ethical assessments to minimize potential violations.
- **Weaknesses:** Requires expertise and commitment and potential for bias and bribery arises.

#### 4.4 Raise Educational Standards and Awareness

- **Strengths:** Empowers users to make informed choices and fosters understanding of data privacy.
- **Weaknesses:** Requires coordinated efforts, and resources and may not impact all users equally; diversity implications arise.

### 5 Recommendations

Based on the analysis conducted, the following reactive recommendations are formulated in response to the scandal. These recommendations emphasize the importance of proactive measures to rebuild trust, enhance transparency, and uphold ethical standards.

- **Implement Stricter Data Regulations:** Comprehensive data privacy regulations that clearly outline data collection practices should be advocated for. This aligns with the ethical principle of *fairness* by ensuring all stakeholders are subject to clear rules regarding data collection and use.
- **Elevate User Control:** Users should have easy access to all their privacy settings and monitor their own internet footprint. This empowers users, aligning with the ethical principle of *autonomy*.
- **Independent Auditing:** Governments should establish independent oversight bodies to audit data practices and investigate potential violations. This fosters *accountability* by providing independent oversight, ensuring companies adhere to regulations and user trust.
- **Ethical Impact Assessments:** Encourage social media companies to proactively and regularly conduct assessments of new technologies and innovations before deployment.

### Conclusion

The Facebook-Cambridge Analytica scandal serves as a stark reminder of the ethical implications of data collection and use in the digital age. By prioritizing user privacy, transparency, and responsible data practices, all stakeholders can work towards a more ethical and trustworthy online environment. This case highlights the need for continuous vigilance and action to protect individual rights and ensure responsible data governance in the digital era.