

Case study: Inappropriate use of Surveys

The Cambridge Analytica scandal in 2018 (Detrow, 2018) exposed the unethical use of surveys and data collection for political purposes, shedding light on broader issues related to privacy, data ethics, and social manipulation. Cambridge Analytica collected personal data from millions of Facebook users through a seemingly innocuous personality quiz app. However, they not only harvested the data of those who took the survey but also obtained the data of their friends without explicit consent. This data was then used for targeted political advertising during the 2016 US presidential election and the UK's Brexit campaign.

The Cambridge Analytica scandal raised serious ethical concerns regarding data privacy and informed consent. Users were unaware of how their data would be used, and their trust in online platforms eroded. It underscored the need for greater transparency and accountability in data collection and usage. (Hossain et al., 2016)

Inappropriate survey use, as exemplified by Cambridge Analytica, can manipulate public opinion and sway elections. It highlights the potential for digital platforms to be exploited for propagating misinformation and divisive content, which can have far-reaching consequences for social cohesion and democracy. (Acemoglu et al., 2022)

The scandal prompted regulatory responses such as the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) in the European Union and heightened scrutiny of data protection laws worldwide. Companies now face stricter legal obligations regarding data handling and user consent. (Shen et al., 2021)

Impact on Professionalism: The misuse of surveys and data for political gain tarnished the reputation of data analytics and marketing professionals. It emphasised

the importance of adhering to ethical standards and professional codes of conduct. (Boddington, 2017).

Deceptive Marketing Surveys: Some companies may use surveys as a guise for marketing and sales purposes. They may present a survey to users, often promising a reward or discount upon completion, but the primary goal is to gather information for targeted advertising. Users may find themselves bombarded with promotional materials or their personal data sold to third-party marketers without their explicit consent. (Esteban-Bravo & Vidal-Sanz, 2021)

Phishing Surveys: Cybercriminals sometimes employ surveys as a phishing tactic. They send out seemingly legitimate surveys via email or on fake websites, asking for personal information such as usernames, passwords, and credit card details. Unsuspecting individuals may fall victim to these scams, believing they are participating in a harmless survey. (Aaron, 2021)

Another example of inappropriate survey use is the sale of personal data to third-party marketers without user consent. In this scenario, individuals may receive unsolicited communications and targeted advertisements, invading their privacy. (Zhu & Chang, 2016).

Inappropriate survey use has profound ethical, social, legal, and professional implications. It erodes trust, undermines privacy, distorts public discourse, and necessitates stronger regulations and ethical considerations in data collection and usage. It serves as a cautionary tale for the responsible handling of data in the digital age, emphasising the need for ethical practices and informed consent in surveys and data analytics.

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