

## **Reflective Activity # 2**

The 2018 Cambridge Analytica scandal illustrates the misuse of surveys to collect and utilize user data. From the case, data from millions of Facebook users were obtained through seemingly innocuous surveys, ultimately revealing the potential risks and ethical concerns associated with such practices. To better understand how this happened and why it was used, one has to delve into the specifics of the Cambridge Analytica case and explore additional examples of inappropriate survey usage. Examining multifaceted impacts of these examples from ethical, social, legal, and professional standpoints.

### **The Cambridge Analytica Scandal**

The Cambridge Analytica scandal unfolded when it was revealed that the political consulting firm, Cambridge Analytica, had harvested the personal data of approximately 87 million Facebook users without their explicit consent (Eke, et al 2020). The primary means through which they collected this data was via a seemingly innocuous personality quiz app called "This Is Your Digital Life." The app was created by Aleksandr Kogan, a researcher at the University of Cambridge, who then shared the data with Cambridge Analytica (Fleming & Bruce, 2021).. This data was subsequently used for political purposes, including influencing voters during the 2016 United States presidential election and the Brexit campaign in the United Kingdom. The Cambridge Analytica case raised numerous ethical concerns. Firstly, the issue of informed consent was at the forefront. Users who took the personality quiz were not adequately informed that their data, along with the data of their friends who did not participate in the survey, would be used for political profiling and targeting. This lack of transparency and informed consent violated basic principles of ethical data collection. The incident also highlighted data privacy ethics. Users expect platforms like Facebook to protect their data, so harvesting it

without authorization undermines confidence and infringes the right to govern personal data. The hack sparked concerns about using personal data to influence political choices, underlining the need for ethical limits in politics.

### **Additional Examples of Inappropriate Survey Usage**

- ❖ **Targeting Vulnerable Populations**-In 2014, Facebook and Cornell University modified users' news feeds to assess the emotional effect of good and negative information (Borenstein, 2021). Failure to get informed consent and possible emotional injury were major criticisms of the research. This illustrates the ethical issue of influencing users' experiences without permission.
- ❖ **Online Surveys and Scams**- Beyond political or academic research, online surveys are often used as bait for scams. Users are promised incentives or prizes in exchange for completing a survey, only to find themselves victims of identity theft, financial fraud, or other malicious activities (Storozuk et al., 2020). This highlights the unethical and illegal aspect of fraudulent survey practices.

### **Ethical Implications**

The inappropriate use of surveys in these examples raises several ethical concerns. The foremost issue is a breach of privacy and informed consent. Individuals have the right to know how their data will be used and to give explicit consent for such usage (Busl et al., 2021). The failure to obtain informed consent violates a fundamental principle of ethical data collection. Furthermore, there is an ethical obligation to avoid harm. Manipulating users' experiences or emotions, as seen in the Facebook-Cornell study, can cause psychological harm and is ethically questionable (Allhoff & Henschke, 2018). Similarly, the inappropriate use of survey data to

influence political decisions, as in the case of Cambridge Analytica, raises ethical concerns about the responsible use of personal information and its potential consequences for society.

### **Social Implications**

From a social standpoint, these examples of inappropriate survey usage erode trust and confidence in digital platforms and research institutions. When users feel that their data and emotions are being manipulated for various purposes without their knowledge, it can lead to decreased engagement, a loss of faith in online communities, and increased skepticism regarding research and political processes (Lissitsa, 2021).. The Cambridge Analytica scandal, in particular, had the potential to distort democratic processes by enabling micro-targeted political advertising based on personality profiles. This raises concerns about the fairness and integrity of elections and the impact on public discourse.

### **Legal Implications**

The legal implications of inappropriate survey usage can be significant. In the case of Cambridge Analytica, the firm faced legal actions, including fines and sanctions (Flew, 2018). Laws such as the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) have imposed strict requirements on data protection and user consent, making non-compliance potentially costly in terms of fines (Voss & Bouthinon-Dumas, 2020). Without informed permission, the Facebook-Cornell study raises legal problems regarding research ethics, which might lead to legal action and regulatory scrutiny.

### **Professional Implications**

Survey misuse has professional consequences. Surveys and research that employ user data must follow ethical and professional standards (Evans & Mathur, 2018). Violating these

norms may damage one's professional reputation and lead to academic or industry discipline. The Facebook study with Cornell University highlighted questions about data scientists' and social media researchers' professional duty. It started digital ethics issues in research.

## **Conclusion**

Mishandling user data and manipulating survey replies has ethical, social, legal, and professional consequences, as shown by the Cambridge Analytica affair. These occurrences cause trust loss, legal issues, and professional accountability discussions. The ethical and transparent gathering, survey, and study of user data must concentrate on informed permission, data privacy, and the avoidance of damage to people and society to avoid such concerns.

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