

Week Five - Reflective Activity 2 / Case Study: Inappropriate Use of Surveys

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Cambridge Analytica (2018): How and Why The Incident Occurred

- **How:** Data were collected from millions of Facebook users via a personality quiz app that accessed not only the data of users who participated but also, through permissions in Facebook's API at the time, gathered data from their friends.
- **Why:** The data were used to create detailed profiles to target American voters with political advertisements tailored to their psychological profiles, aiming to influence voter behaviour during the 2016 U.S. Presidential election.

Other Example

LocationSmart Data Leak (2018)

How and Why It Happened:

- **How:** LocationSmart, a location data broker, was found to have a vulnerability on its website that allowed real-time location data of mobile phone users to be accessed without adequate security measures. This data included information from customers across several major U.S. telecom carriers.
- **Why:** The company purportedly provided services to businesses for legitimate purposes, such as fraud prevention and emergency roadside assistance. However, the lack of robust security measures led to potential unauthorized access to sensitive personal data.

Impact Analysis

Ethical Impact:

- **Privacy Violations:** The exposure of real-time location data without robust consent mechanisms and security protections violates basic ethical standards of privacy.
- **Transparency:** There was a significant lack of transparency in how LocationSmart collected, used, and secured the sensitive location data of individuals.

Social Impact:

- **Erosion of Trust:** The incident significantly undermined public trust in businesses that handle sensitive data. Users became more skeptical about sharing their location data, fearing misuse.
- **Public Concerns:** The incident raised public awareness and concerns regarding the extent of surveillance and data collection capabilities accessible to companies.

Legal Impact:

- **Regulatory Scrutiny:** The breach likely subjected LocationSmart to investigations and potential penalties under data protection laws like those enforced by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) and possibly triggered inquiries under state privacy laws in the U.S.
- **Calls for Stronger Regulations:** Incidents like this have led to calls for stricter regulations on data brokers and the need for clearer consent requirements before collecting location data.

Professional Impact:

- **Reputational Damage:** LocationSmart faced significant reputational damage, which could affect its business relationships and future contracts.
- **Industry Standards:** This incident highlighted a need for higher industry standards and practices concerning data security and ethical data handling.

Conclusion: The LocationSmart incident serves as a stark example of the inappropriate use of surveys and data collection, illustrating the profound ethical, social, legal, and professional repercussions of mishandling personal data. It underscores the importance of implementing stringent security measures, ensuring transparency, and maintaining ethical standards in data collection and management. This case serves as a reminder to all companies dealing with personal data to uphold high standards to maintain trust and comply with legal requirements.

Reference

Wattles, J. (2018) 'Website flaw exposed real-time location for millions of cell phones, experts say', *CNN Business*, 18 May. Available at: <https://www.cnn.com/2018/05/18/tech/locationsmart-website-flaw-exposes-real-time-location/index.html> [Accessed 22 April 2024].