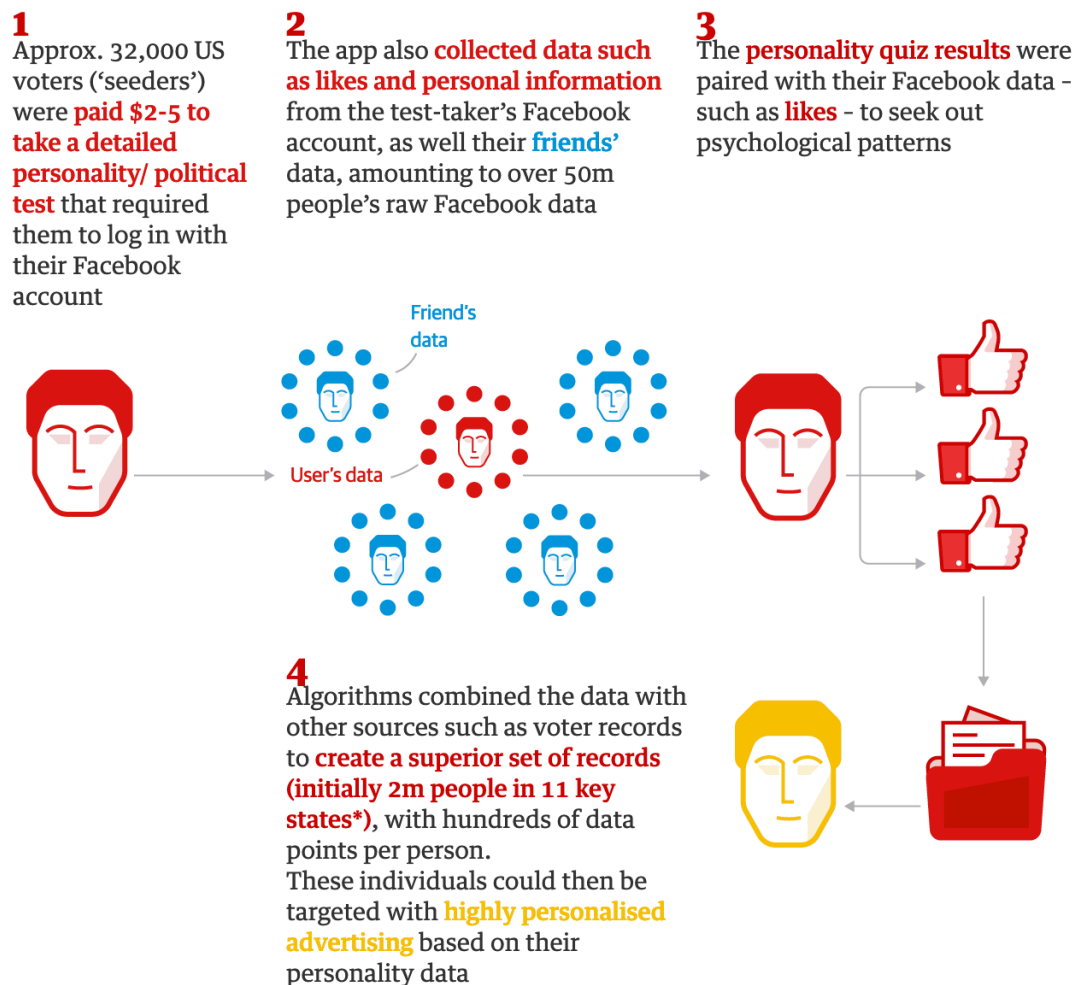


Field study on the Cambridge Analytica scandal

During the 2016 US presidential election and the 2017 British referendum, a private corporation called 'Cambridge Analytica' (CA) was hired by the Trump and 'Leave' campaigns, respectively, to use targeted social media advertising to win voters. To the surprise (and/or shock) of many, both campaigns were successful, winning their respective elections by small margins, having massive consequences to world politics.

In the time that followed, CA was put in spotlight because the method by which they obtained their social media data from Facebook was [questionable](#). They created a personality quiz app called 'This Is Your Digital Life', where users were paid to take a test about personality and attitudes, and give access to their likes and messages. CA could therefore train a model to predict personality, political orientation and more from likes (a method originally patented by Facebook [1]). But importantly, the app also got access to the data of participants' friends—almost the entire US population—and could, therefore, apply the trained model to obtain their personality and political leaning. Below is an illustration of the CA approach taken from The Guardian [2].



CA was not the first to realize you could do this. Two well intentioned Cambridge psychology researchers David Stillwell and Michal Kosinski had been collecting personality and behavioral data from Facebook between the years 2007 and 2012 using (another earlier) app called [myPersonality](#). The dataset was used in more than 100 high-impact social science studies, and influenced data privacy regulations on social media worldwide. But it was in close vicinity at the same university that Aleksandr Kogan, later data scientist at CA but then professor at the institute, created the 'This Is Your Digital Life' app. He even, [according to Kosinski](#), approached the two and asked for a partnership.

There is still debate about the impact CA had on the elections, but research by Stillwell and Kosinski convincingly shows that personality and political attitudes can be predicted very accurately using Facebook likes [3, 4] and, more importantly, that personality targeting is effective for mass persuasion [5].

For this field study we are going to watch the Netflix documentary 'The Great Hack'. To understand the problem and technical details better, please read [3] and [5] in advance*.

* If you are new to reading research papers they can feel dense. But if you have fully understood the figures you have more or less understood the paper. The best approach (and what most researchers themselves do anyway) is to read the abstract and introduction to the point where you understand what the paper wants to show, then try to understand the figures, and look into the main text for clues if that gets hard. Then you read the conclusion/discussion.