

**Facebook-Cambridge Analytica Data Scandal:**  
**An Examination of Personal Data Privacy and Digital Ethics Issues**

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## **Abstract**

With the developments in information and communication technologies, the spread of the internet to all areas has ushered in the information age and accordingly paved the way for discussions on digital privacy and security. With new communication technologies, the products created by digital labor and knowledge of individuals have been used unauthorized and unlawfully by the owners of capital and power for political, personal and many personal reasons. The Facebook Cambridge Analytica Scandal, which emerged with the 2016 US elections, was selected as an example of ethical and personal data violations and analyzed through a literature review.

## **Introduction**

The Web 1.0 period, which we can call the early ages of the Internet, was a one-way communication where individuals remained passive except for accessing information. This period was a time when individuals could access information through limited resources until the Web 2.0 period, which we can call two-way or interactive communication, began thanks to the hunger for information and the irresistible sense of development and curiosity in the human mind. This interactive era has enabled individuals to take an active role in this field, which we can call the virtual world, and to be present in both directions of communication.

This development of the Internet has led to the emergence of platforms other than traditional media, which we call social media, where individuals play a more active role and information interaction is at the highest possible level, unlike traditional media. These platforms have undeniably contributed to interactive communication. With such an increase in interaction, every information produced and shared, every scientific and non-scientific data that can be collected at any time has become a source of nourishment, especially for researchers interested in social movements and human behavior. This raises questions about how to protect access to and sharing of data and where to draw the line. Otherwise, these globally operating and corporatized platforms can threaten the digital security and privacy of individuals for all kinds of material and moral profits, and many commercial companies that can abuse user data for personal and political purposes, which is the main subject of our sample.

## Facebook-Cambridge Analytica Scandal

### Facebook

Facebook was founded in 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg, with the area code "thefacebook.com" and the name "theFacebook", which was later changed, in order to enable other students at the university to communicate with each other. Facebook had limited functionality in its early versions. On the platform, which only included students' profiles, students could only upload their own photos to the platform, write their names, and enter some basic information about themselves. Student email was required to register on the platform. Although it was created for Harvard students, over time it began to grow in popularity at schools throughout the rest of the United States. The platform, which remains popular even now, is one of the most popular social media platforms with 2.09 billion daily users as of 2024.

### *Facebook Statistics*

Years	User Growth Rate	Number of Users	Revenue	Average Revenue Per User
2012	41.4%	1.06B	5.089M	5.32
2013	16.1%	1.23B	7.872M	6.81
2014	13.1%	1.39B	12.466M	9.45
2015	14.4%	1.59B	17.928M	11.96
2016	16.9%	1.86B	27.638M	15.98
2017	14.5%	2.13B	40.653M	20.21
2018	8.9%	2.32B	55.838M	24.96
2019	7.8%	2.50B	70.697M	29.25
2020	3.9%	2.80B	86.965M	32.03
2021	1.7%	2.91B	117.929M	40.96
2022	4.4%	2.96B	116.609M	39.63
2023	3.7%	3.07B	134.902M	44.6

### Cambridge Analytica

Cambridge Analytica was a British political consulting firm founded in 2013 under the SCL Group that assembles and analyzes statistics for electoral processes. Two notable campaigns linked to Cambridge Analytica were the Leave campaign in the 2016 Brexit referendum debate and Donald Trump's 2016 presidential election campaign. In 2018,

following the Facebook-Cambridge Analytica scandal, the parent company filed for bankruptcy proceedings and closed operations, which resulted in its dissolution.

### **Facebook-Cambridge Analytica Scandal**

The Facebook-Cambridge Analytica scandal broke out in March 2018, shedding light on the abuse of users' digital security and data privacy by companies. In 2014, Cambridge Analytica and a researcher named Dr. Aleksandr Kogan developed a Facebook-integrated app called "thisisyourdigitallife". Users assumed it was one of the many similar personality tests on the market, but it was more than that. In the background, the app collected users' data without their consent. It is estimated that the app was used by around 270,000 people, but the app also collected data from contacts beyond the user, such as family members and friends. In this way, millions of people's data was collected through Facebook. Cambridge Analytica allegedly used this data in the two important campaigns I mentioned earlier. The first was the 2016 US Presidential election and the second was the Brexit Referendum in the UK. In both cases, they made their advertisements by creating psychological profiles of the users with the unlawful data they collected. In 2018, leading media outlets The Guardian and The New York Times exposed the extent of data misuse in their reports. This revelation led to many condemnations and investigations. In the aftermath of this crisis, Facebook shares fell, Cambridge Analytica was dissolved, and Mark Zuckerberg was called to testify publicly before Congress. As a result of the investigation, Facebook was fined a record \$5 billion by the US Federal Trade Commission (FTC).

### **In conclusion**

The scandal prompted Facebook and many other companies to make changes and reforms to their policies on digital security, privacy and data protection. Efforts have been made to increase transparency and accountability. In addition, this event showed how large the extent of abuse of personal data can be and how it can affect the future existence and shape of countries in terms of democracy. The importance of data privacy and the need for more oversight of companies has also emerged as an important issue. The Facebook-Cambridge Analytica scandal will be an important case study for ongoing and future debates on the ethical use of digital data.

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