RMPP – Unit 5 – Reflective Activity 2 – Zihaad Khan

Case Study: Inappropriate Use of Surveys

In 2018, Cambridge Analytica was in the news in the United Kingdom and the USA (Confessore, 2018) for obtaining and sharing data obtained from millions of Facebook users. They obtained the data through innocuous surveys on Facebook (you may have seen this type of survey and probably participated at times). This is probably the highest profile of surveys used for alternative means and, probably, monetary gains. However, this happens often through various media.

Consider how exactly this happened and why it was used. Find one or two further examples of inappropriate use of surveys and highlight the impact of all these examples from the various ethical, social, legal and professional standpoints that apply.

Record your findings in your e-Portfolio. You can also submit your findings to your tutor for formative feedback.

Response:

According to Cadwalladr and Graham-Harrison (2018) an application called "This is Your Digital Life" developed by Aleksandr Kogan was used to collect data from millions of users who took a personality quiz. The application was installed by 270,000 Facebook users and granted access to users data (Cadwalladr & Graham-Harrison, 2018). This data was then harvested without their knowledge or consent and was used to build profiles of voters for an upcoming USA presidential election (Kalvapalle, 2018).

Cambridge Analytica then used this data to target users and influence their voting behaviour (Confessore, 2018).

This incident raised various concerns around the unethical use of personal information as well as data privacy. The incident clearly violates the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) in terms of unlawful processing of personal information as well as the disclosure of personal information (GDPR, 2023).

Another case that highlights the inappropriate use of surveys is the case of targeted advertising by Facebook in the year 2016. According to Angwin et al. (2016) Facebook's ad platform allowed advertisers to exclude people based on their race. The ad platform was used to exclude people who self-identified as African American, Asian American, and Hispanic from receiving specific housing and job ads. This was found to be illegal according to the Fair Housing Act of 1968 (Angwin et al., 2016). Furthermore the ad violated ethical standards of non-discrimination and equal access to opportunities (Angwin et al., 2016).

References

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Confessore, N. (2018) How Trump Consultants Exploited the Facebook Data of Millions. The New York Times. Available from: https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/17/us/politics/cambridge-analytica-trump-campaign.html [Accessed 26 February 2023].

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