

News and analysis

Facebook misuses users' personal data



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The news

British newspaper *The Observer* reported on 18 March how 50 million Facebook user profiles were harvested by Cambridge Analytica to help the US presidential campaign.

Whistleblower Christopher Wylie, a former Cambridge Analytica contractor, accused the firm of using the information, without permission, to build a system that could target voters with personalised political advertisements. Facebook's privacy practices have also come under fire after it emerged that another data analytics firm, CubeYou, was collecting information about users, without consent, through its quizzes.

Investigators from Britain's data watchdog raided Cambridge Analytica's London offices on 23 March, and the main consumer protection body in the US opened an investigation into whether Facebook has violated privacy agreements.

At the time of writing, Facebook revealed that 87 million accounts – 37 million more than previously reported – have been affected by privacy violation.



The views

"The Cambridge Analytica scandal and how it has damaged the trust that 2.1bn people have in Facebook reminds me of what happened in the motor industry in the 1960s," John Scott, Director at Bywater Ltd, told *QW*.

In 1965, manufacturers in the US dominated the American market with flashy and popular cars but the number of deaths on the roads forced the introduction of mandatory safety measures, such as seat belts. Scott explained that this saved millions of lives, but it also led to a paradigm shift in the dynamics of the industry. In particular, German carmakers stole the opportunity by quickly redesigning their products and grab market share.

Scott said: "May 2018 heralds significant changes in laws around data protection that I think we will look back on in the same way. People keep talking about the risks and consequences of not meeting the requirements. I see it as an opportunity – embracing it will build the trust of your customers and through this, give you competitive advantage. Quality professionals can be at the heart of this."



The analysis

Vincent Desmond, CEO of the Chartered Quality Institute, commented on the scandal saying: "The technology sector has grown rapidly in recent years. As a result, the checks and balances that would normally be in place in more established businesses and sectors are unfortunately lacking.

"Facebook has fallen foul of an age-old issue, namely that policies have been put in place, without any real thought as to how they will be enforced. The fact that Cambridge Analytica was allegedly able to export and exploit data for political gain is disquieting, but potentially of greater concern is the fact that there are tens of thousands of similar acts occurring daily across a range of digital channels, which should be subject to the same types of policies."

Desmond believes data controllers failed to audit how information is being used by third-party data processors. "There is also a failure to put in place the quality assurance measures that would prevent these issues from occurring in the first place," he concludes.

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