

The Cambridge Analytica scandal



The massive political and social data scandal of Cambridge Analytica has come into light after Chris Wylie, an ex-employee of the company revealed about the company's illegal data fetching modus operandi which indicated that Facebook data of over 50 million users was extracted by the firm without users' consent and was used by high-profile political links.

To start off with, Cambridge Analytica is a data analytics and political consulting firm based in Britain since 2014, and describes themselves as specialising in data, analytics and strategy. Cambridge Analytica's services were reportedly used by US President Donald Trump for election strategies in 2016 - the practice of using consultants to help win elections is not uncommon in politics. However, the thing that makes it a "scandal" came into light after a whistleblower revealed to Channel 4 News that Cambridge Analytica used illegal data grab of over 50 million Facebook profiles; henceforth playing a pivotal role in the victory of Donald Trump as President of the US.

As per information revealed by Wylie, CA acquired the data in 2014, via a personality profiling app, *thisisyourdigitallife*, built by Aleksandr Kogan, an academic at Cambridge University. The app was downloaded and used by just 2,70,000 Facebook user - but the app pulled out data from all Facebook friends of the app users without consent of any user. This allowed CA to illegally harvest data of over 50 million Facebook users, which was then used for micro-targeting all users for political campaigning based on their preferences and vulnerabilities, for instance. It got worse when further investigation revealed that the strategies included using women and actually "send Ukrainian girls" or offer bribes to the opponent candidates and release the recorded videos into the "bloodstream of the Internet" to bring them down.

Unsurprisingly, Cambridge Analytica's services weren't just limited to Donald Trump's election victory - deep digging into the scandal revealed that the executives of CA boasted about successes in over 200 election campaigns in many countries, including India, Argentina, the Czech Republic, Nigeria and Kenya. About India, while the official connections of CA with Indian political parties have not been revealed yet, we all know that the previous 2014 election was characterized by claims of extensive use of data analytics on social media. Illegal harvesting of data is all over the world, and as users, we need to remember that anything sent out online is being harvested or is vulnerable of being harvested ? without your consent. Beware.