

Cambridge Analytica: firm at the heart of Facebook scandal

March 19 2018



According to reports, Cambridge Analytica stole information from 50 million Facebook users' profiles to help design software to predict and influence voters' choices

At the centre of a scandal over alleged misuse of Facebook users' personal data, Cambridge Analytica is a communications firm hired by

those behind Donald Trump's successful US presidential bid.

An affiliate of British firm Strategic Communication Laboratories (SCL), Cambridge Analytica has offices in London, New York, Washington, as well as Brazil and Malaysia.

Here's the story behind the company using data to fuel [political campaigns](#):

What does Cambridge Analytica do?

The company boasts it can "find your voters and move them to action" through data-driven campaigns and a team including data scientists and behavioural psychologists.

"Within the United States alone, we have played a pivotal role in winning presidential races as well as congressional and state elections," with data on more than 230 million American voters, Cambridge Analytica claims on its website.

Speaking to TechCrunch in 2017, CEO Alexander Nix said the firm was "always acquiring more" data.

"Every day we have teams looking for new data sets," he told the site.

Who are the company's clients?

As well as working on the election which saw Trump reach the White House, Cambridge Analytica has been involved in political campaigns around the world.

In the US, analysts harnessed data to generate thousands of messages

targeting voters through their profiles on [social media](#) such as Facebook, Snapchat, or the Pandora Radio streaming service.

British press have credited Cambridge Analytica with providing services to pro-Brexit campaign Leave.EU, but Nix has denied working for the group.

Globally, Cambridge Analytica said it has worked in Italy, Kenya, South Africa, Colombia and Indonesia.



Cambridge Analytica CEO Alexander Nix has said the firm was "always acquiring more" data

What has the company been accused of?

According to the New York Times and Britain's Observer newspapers, Cambridge Analytica stole information from 50 million Facebook users' profiles in the tech giant's biggest-ever data breach, to help them design software to predict and influence voters' choices at the ballot box.

University of Cambridge psychologist Aleksandr Kogan created a personality prediction test app, *thisisyourdigitallife*, which was downloaded by 270,000 people.

The tool allowed Kogan to access information such as content Facebook users had "liked" and the city they listed on their profile, which was then passed to SCL and Cambridge Analytica.

The Observer reported the app also collected information from the Facebook friends of people who had taken the test.

Christopher Wylie, a former Cambridge Analytica employee, worked with Kogan and told Canadian television channel CBC the company used "private data they acquired without consent".

Who else is involved?

US hedge fund billionaire Robert Mercer—and major Republican party donor—bankrolled Cambridge Analytica to the tune of \$15 million (12 million euros).

The Observer said it was headed at the time by Steve Bannon, a top Trump adviser until he was fired last summer.

How has Facebook responded?

Facebook suspended SCL and Cambridge Analytica, as well as Kogan and Wylie.

In explaining its decision on Friday, the social media giant said the thisisyourdigitallife app was legitimate, but accused Kogan of subsequently violating Facebook's terms by passing the data on to SCL/Cambridge Analytica.

Facebook said it found out what had happened in 2015 and was told all parties involved had deleted the data.

"The claim that this is a data breach is completely false," Facebook said in a new statement on Saturday, saying app users knowingly provided their information.

© 2018 AFP

Citation: Cambridge Analytica: firm at the heart of Facebook scandal (2018, March 19) retrieved 3 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2018-03-cambridge-analytica-firm-heart-facebook.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--