Survey finds public trust in Facebook plummeted after Cambridge Analytical scandal

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A new AI tool created to help identify certain kinds of substance abuse based on a homeless youth's Facebook posts could provide homeless shelters with vital information to incorporate into each individual's case management plan. Credit: CC0 Public Domain

Much of America believed in Facebook as the unassuming social network, connecting friends and family on the internet while protecting their privacy.

That belief has been shattered because of Facebook's entanglement with Cambridge Analytica, a survey released this week says.

The survey from Ponemon Institute—a Michigan-based research group which surveys Americans' opinions on privacy, data protection and information security policy—found that only 27 percent of Americans believe Facebook is committed to protecting the privacy of their personal information after the Cambridge Analytica revelations.

The 27 percent figure was 52 percentage points lower than in the survey in 2017. Ponemon Institute's study has asked same question since 2011, when 67 percent of respondents expressed trust in Facebook.

"We found that people care deeply about their privacy and when there is a mega data breach, as in the case of Facebook, people will express their concern," Larry Ponemon, the institute's chairman, told NBC News. "And some people will actually vote with their feet and leave."

Facebook has been dealing with major blowback since it was revealed last month that the British political data firm Cambridge Analytica improperly collected up to 87 million Facebook users' data without their permission and used it for political campaigns, such as Donald Trump's 2016 presidential campaign. Because of the major backlash, Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg testified to Congress last week to explain the company's relationship with Cambridge Analytica and its general data privacy practices, among other things.

Zuckerberg's testimony did not sway many Americans, according to Ponemon Institute's survey. After hearing the testimony, those who

believed in Facebook's commitment to protecting user privacy rose only from 27 percent to 28 percent.

Despite a rising lack of faith in Facebook, a significant number of users have not considered lessening their usage of or stopping altogether their use of Facebook, the survey found. Forty-five percent of users said it was unlikely the Cambridge Analytica scandal was going to change their Facebook usage behavior and 15 percent said it would have no impact.

In general, respondents signaled they want more transparency and protections surrounding their Facebook user data. Regarding the statement, "Facebook has an obligation to inform me if my personal information is lost or stolen," those who agreed or strongly agreed rose from 48 percent last year to 73 percent this year.

Another notable jump was about whether the government should regulate Facebook and other internet platforms to protect user privacy. In 2017, 40 percent agreed or strongly agreed. After the Cambridge Analytica scandal, the figure rose to 54 percent.

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