Surveying the Australian General Public’s Attitudes towards Personal Data on Facebook

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July 10, 2020

Abstract

During March of 2018, a Cambridge Analytica-employed contractor reportedly gained unauthorised access to personal data stored on Facebook servers (Lapaire, 2018). Using a ‘scraping program’, Aleksandr Kogan obtained the personal data of approximately 87-million Facebook users (Lapaire, 2018; Lotrea, 2018). This data was later lawfully sold to Cambridge Analytica and used to create detailed profiles of Facebook users’ identities. Zuboff (2015) states the instigator for legislative change rectifying deficiencies allowing such happenings is the general public’s understanding of commodifying identity as threatening to privacy. The United States of America and the European Parliament heard requisite testimonies by Mark Zuckerberg regarding these events, but Australia did not. The alternate attitudes towards personal data on Facebook within Australia gave merit to the current study’s likewise investigation. A 25-item attitudinal questionnaire was administered via a Qualtrics survey to a snowball sampling of 65 participants. Via exploratory factor analysis the remaining 19-items which comprised the tool labelled the ‘Commodi-5’ was deemed valid for use with participants and similar populations. Additionally, the tool was deemed appropriately reliable via Cronbach’s reliability coefficient. Significance testing of the recorded data demonstrated participants desired the legislative change which Zuboff (2015) describes; however, legislative change has not yet occurred in Australia. This study proposes this may be because the attitudes possessed by the Australian general public are not uniform to those possessed by appointed officials. The implications of which should be the focus of future research.

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