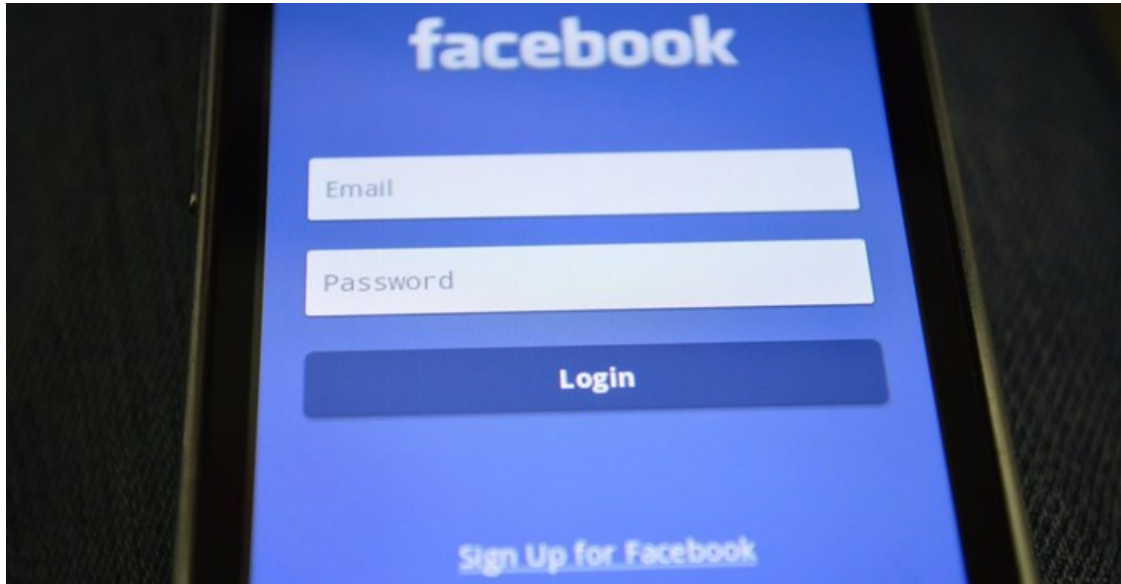


Facebook suspends Trump campaign data firm Cambridge Analytica

WASHINGTON, USA - Facebook says it has suspended the account of Cambridge Analytica, the data analysis firm hired by Donald Trump's 2016 presidential campaign, amid reports it harvested the profile information of millions of US voters without their permission.



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According to the *New York Times* and Britain's *Observer*, the company 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.

Also suspended were the accounts of its parent organisation, Strategic Communication Laboratories, as well as those of University of Cambridge psychologist Aleksandr Kogan and Christopher Wylie, a Canadian data analytics expert who worked with Kogan.

Cambridge Analytica was bankrolled to the tune of \$15m by US hedge fund billionaire Robert Mercer, a major Republican donor. The *Observer* said it was headed at the time by Steve Bannon, a top Trump adviser until he was fired last summer.

Violated Platform Policies

"In 2015, we learned that ... Kogan lied to us and violated our Platform Policies by passing data from an app that was using Facebook Login to SCL/Cambridge Analytica, a firm that does political, government and military work around the globe," Facebook said in a posting late Friday by its vice president and deputy general counsel Paul Grewal.

Kogan also improperly shared the data with Wylie, it said.

Kogan's app, *thisisyourdigitallife*, offered a personality prediction test, describing itself on Facebook as "a research app used by psychologists."

Some 270,000 people downloaded the app, allowing Kogan to access information such as the city listed on their profile, or content they had "liked."

"However, the app also collected the information of the test-takers' Facebook friends, leading to the accumulation of a data pool tens of millions-strong," the *Observer* reported.

Misuse of data

Facebook later pushed back against the claim of a data breach, issuing a fresh statement on Saturday that suggested the misused data was limited to those who voluntarily took the test.

"People knowingly provided their information, no systems were infiltrated, and no passwords or sensitive pieces of information were stolen or hacked," Grewal said.

Cambridge Analytica meanwhile said it was in touch with Facebook "in order to resolve this matter as quickly as possible".

It blamed the misuse of data on Kogan and said it has since deleted all the data it received from a company he founded, Global Science Research (GSR).

"No data from GSR was used by Cambridge Analytica as part of the services it provided to the Donald Trump 2016 presidential campaign," it said.

Exploited Facebook

But Wylie, who later became a whistleblower, told the *Observer*: "We exploited Facebook to harvest millions of people's profiles. And built models to exploit what we knew about them and target their inner demons. That was the basis that the entire company was built on."

Kogan legitimately obtained the information but "violated platform policies" by passing information to SCL/Cambridge Analytica and Wylie, according to Facebook.

Facebook said it removed the app in 2015 when it learned of the violation and was told by Kogan and everyone who received the data that it had since been destroyed.

"Several days ago, we received reports that, contrary to the certifications we were given, not all data was deleted," Grewal wrote.

"We are moving aggressively to determine the accuracy of these claims. If true, this is another unacceptable violation of trust and the commitments they made.

"We are suspending SCL/Cambridge Analytica, Wylie and Kogan from Facebook, pending further information."

Investigation by Britain's parliament and regulators

Cambridge Analytica, the US unit of British behavioural marketing firm SCL, rose to prominence as the firm that the pro-Brexit group Leave. EU hired for data-gathering and audience-targeting.

The company is facing an investigation by Britain's parliament and regulators over its handling of information.

On Saturday, Britain's information commissioner Elizabeth Denham said: "We are investigating the circumstances in which Facebook data may have been illegally acquired and used.

"It's part of our ongoing investigation into the use of data analytics for political purposes which was launched to consider how political parties and campaigns, data analytics companies and social media platforms in the UK are using and analysing people's personal information to micro-target voters."

The *New York Times* meanwhile reported that copies of the data harvested for Cambridge Analytica were still online and that its team had viewed some of the raw data.

Source: AFP via I-Net Bridge.

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