REFLECTION:
CASE STUDY: INAPPROPRIATE USE OF SURVEYS

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INTRODUCTION

Cambridge Analytica inappropriately harvested 87 million Facebook profiles through a personality test, which shared data of the 270,000 participants and their Facebook friends (Afriat et al., 2020). None of the users or their friends opted in to the psychographically targeted advertising, which allegedly manipulated the US 2016 presidential election and beyond (Hinds et al., 2020). While high profile, unethical microtargeting is not the only inappropriate use of surveys. Push polls have been disinforming voters for years, simply by using misleading wording.

DISCUSSION

Global Science Research (GSR), set up by Cambridge University researcher and psychologist Aleksander Kogan, paid 270,000 respondents a few dollars to take a personality test entitled "This is Your Digital Life" and provide consent to their Facebook data, which included their page likes and their friends' page likes (Rathi, 2019). Users were then profiled based on Facebook activities and personality model OCEAN (Openness, Conscientiousness, Extroversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism) (Kanakia et al., 2019; Rathi, 2019). Accessing this data was not technically a breach at this time, however, selling data collected this way to Cambridge Analytica was prohibited (Kanakia et al., 2019). Psychographic micro-targeted advertisements were then presented to enhance or reinforce user's political views (Berghel, 2018; Kanakia et al., 2019).

As Boldyreva et al. (2018) state, '[a]dvertising becomes targeting' when artificial intelligence (AI) is used to analyse user personality with a five-factor model like OCEAN to manipulate their behaviour. Ads are hyper-personalised in micro-

targeting, although Berghel (2018) notes it is not proven that Cambridge Analytica was the dominant manipulation strategy for Trump's electoral result in 2016.

While Cambridge Analytica used AI, manipulation via surveys can be simple. Rather than gathering opinions, a push poll intentionally misinforms only using survey wording (Murphy et al., 2021). Murphy et al. (2021) argue that push-polls undermine public faith in politics, legitimate polling, and can distort memories to substantiate fake news. Push-polling is not new; its intent is to mislead, predominantly in politics (Gerstmann & Streb, 2004).

While not the only reason, a predominant theme of unethical surveys appears to be political disinformation to manipulate elections. While the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) Order fined Facebook $5 billion, and mandated some data privacy regulations, such as requiring Facebook to gain explicit user consent, it was unable to address the psychographic profiling and manipulation of users' political views, thereby affecting the democratic process (Hu, 2020).

Wagner (2021) describes information as a weapon, following the Cambridge Analytica scandal. At the time, the maximum penalty was $643,000 under the Data Protection Act of 1998. Updates to the law would now lead to a fine of $22 million. However, Wagner (2021) argues that rather than a data breach, this is a privacy harm, breaching Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) principles, and that 'privacy by design' is required.

Facebook changed its privacy settings, with some users changing theirs, some younger users leaving to other social media platforms, and some simply seeing loss of data privacy as the trade for free service (Afriat et al., 2020). Regardless of the scandal, however, users still want to engage on social media and continue to use

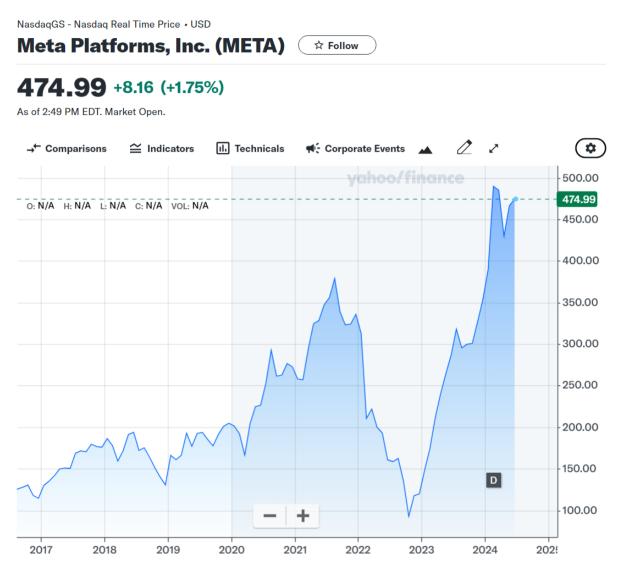Facebook (Afriat et al., 2020), with its stock price notably higher now than prior to the 2018 scandal (Figure 1).

FIGURE 1 | Meta (Facebook) stock price

CONCLUSION

The Cambridge Analytica scandal highlights ethical, social, legal and professional issues in survey misuse for political manipulation. Users did not consent to political advertising; however, many still use social media. Regulations have become tougher on data protection but still may not protect against voter manipulation. Professionally,

the FTC's $5 billion fine against Facebook demonstrates that companies have a professional responsibility. Wagner's (2021) 'privacy by design' is a valid professional requirement but does not address the simple manipulation of push-polls nor the consistent shift to micro-targeted advertising. In summary, survey misuse and data harvesting is unlikely to stop, flagging the ongoing need for oversight, privacy protections, and legislation to protect democracy.

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