

The Great Hack: A leadership, not data, crisis

By  Lisa Steingold

27 Aug 2019

“ This chilling documentary lays bare the cynicism and chaos surrounding the data research company that harvested information from millions of Facebook users - *The Guardian* ”

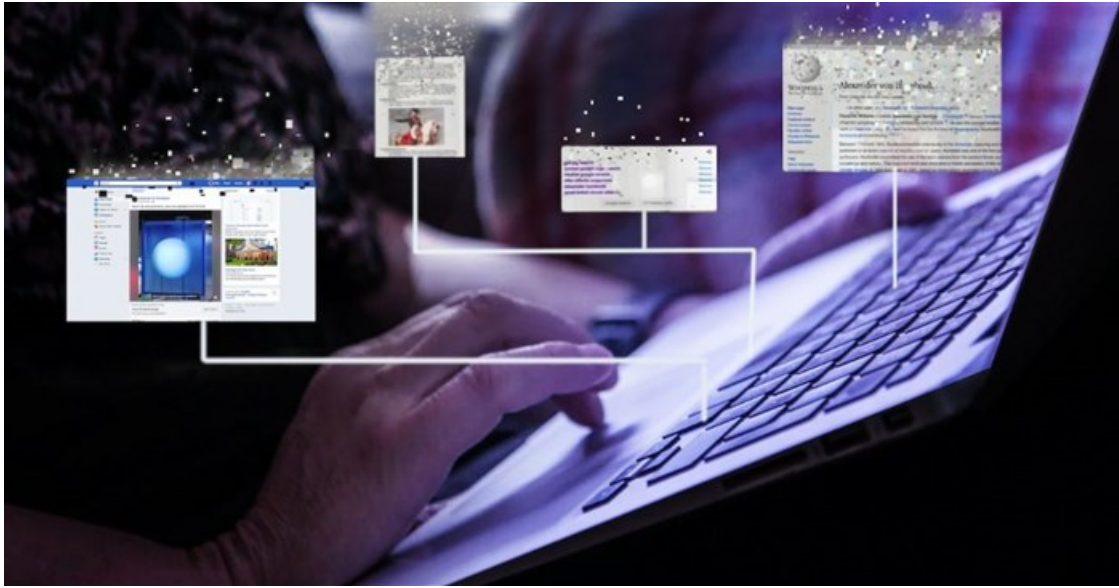


Image credit: Netflix.

The Great Hack debuted on Netflix recently with the shocking tale of David Carroll's quest to claim his data, which led to the unravelling of the Facebook-Cambridge Analytica data scandal and, ultimately, to the dissolution of Cambridge Analytica itself.



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Long story short, the documentary is an investigation into the data research company and how it cleverly harvested information from millions of Facebook users and their friends via an innocuous-seeming “personality” questionnaire – swaying votes in the Trump campaign, the Leave.EU campaign and other political campaigns the world over.



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16 Apr 2019



Straight outta sci-fi fantasy

Whilst the film may seem something out of a fantasy sci-fi, it's sadly a portrayal of real-world events and depicts Cambridge Analytica's leadership team giggling over the fact that they'd won the campaign for their client; a client who persuaded

voters knowingly and impacted the future of an entire country.

As a result of its involvement, Facebook was forced to pay a fine of \$5bn. Given that the company earns some \$15bn in revenue per quarter, this is hardly even a slap on the wrist and has not even impacted shareholders with the stock price remaining stable.

There are many angles with which to depict this story; the data angle, the human rights angle, but what begs the greatest question in my mind is the leadership angle and how data needs to be integrated at board-level as a key topic for discussion.

As a head of marketing, I'm familiar with the tools at hand to deliver the right message to the right person at the right time. In marketing circles, we call it personalisation.

Ideally, it's about delivering relevant content to people who expect to see that content with a view to engaging.

Data got you in its sway

What Cambridge Analytica did was to take a few steps too far and manipulate the behaviour of certain people according to their ability to be 'swayed' based on feeding them 'false' information.

One wonders where the board of the firm was at this time. They were the ones condoning such action and even creating the structures needed to support it.

A bankruptcy petition for May 2018 noted that Cambridge Analytica LLC had also operated under other names. On the bankruptcy petition, Rebekah Mercer and Jennifer Mercer are listed as being the governing board of Cambridge Analytica, daughters of Robert Mercer, the billionaire who donated to US President Donald Trump's campaign.

“ *'The Great Hack' documentary literally made me sick to my stomach. Especially the part where they showed how they influenced elections and created division among people across the world* 💎💎N.B.
last year DATA surpassed OIL in value. DATA is the most valuable asset on earth 💎💎 pic.twitter.com/Wzlvk5eRLk
— #SHEDECIDES (@baksbrenda) [August 23, 2019](#) ”

It's a deep and long dark hole my friends. My point is that with the ever-increasing rise of AI (artificial intelligence) and data points, leaders need to not only equip themselves with the necessary skills and knowledge to ask the right questions but to consider the needs and, indeed, even the rights of their customers first and foremost.



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Data is not the enemy. It's a tool, which harnessed correctly, can create a positive and profound impact on the lives of customers. What's needed to enable this are leadership teams who can leverage data with wisdom and are committed to delivering systemic value.

ABOUT LISA STEINGOLD

Lisa Steingold is a marketer, wannabe cyclist and author of *Out the Crap; the Power of Authenticity for Brands*.

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