Influencing Voter's Choice - Facebook

What is the issue?

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- The Cambridge Analytica involved in data breach controversy used users' details obtained from Facebook.
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- It was allegedly used to influence voter's preferences in the American Presidential election.
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How are user preferences observed?

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- Individual interacting with Facebook over a period of time are observed.
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- The platform gathers enough information about the likes and dislikes of the person.
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- It becomes aware of the kinds of people the individual follows and the types of news sources that s/he prefers.
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- The range of actions and reactions from the user, for the posts from these sources, is also observed.
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- All these data, when combined, help in putting together a picture of the user's political affiliation and inclinations.
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How are users generally targeted?

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- Facebook has an advertisement preferences page.

- It helps the platform to serve up advertisements according to user preferences.
- Based on an individual's likes and dislikes, it lists topics, people and interests, which it thinks are good enough to push ads to the user.
- With the availability of advertisements of all kinds, Facebook allows a good degree of targeting.
- Usually, the targeting is based on age, location and interests.

What did Cambridge Analytica do?

- Cambridge Analytica did not gather data from Facebook through advertisement preferences.
- The firm allegedly took the help of a psychology professor at Cambridge University.
- The professor designed an application, 'thisisyourdigitallife', to gather information about users.
- This third party app used Facebook's login API (application programming interface).
- This allows people to use their Facebook profile instead of creating a new account.
- This is allowed under Facebook's rules and guidelines.
- However, the professor then shared the data with Cambridge Analytica, which is against the morms.
- The app was projected to be for a personality quiz.
- The questions were framed in a manner so as to draw out details about the quiz-taker's political leanings and related aspects.
- The acquired data would then provide raw material for a detailed profile of

the potential voter.

How were voters influenced?

- With the kind of data Cambridge Analytica had, it allegedly influenced voters in many American states.
- It specifically targeted those who had not made up their minds, and had a high probability of moving.
- E.g. people dissatisfied with economic slowdown and resultant unemployment were targeted with the pro-Trump campaign.
- A certain line of narrative to these voters over a period of time may have helped them in making their choices.

Source: Indian Express