



Trump Facebook Data Manipulation: Obama Did the Same and More in 2012

With all the reporting on the Facebook/Cambridge Analytica data breach having been used to manipulate voters for Donald Trump in the 2016 election, it is noteworthy that the liberal media are silent about Barack Obama doing the same and more in 2012.

As this writer reported in a [previous article](#) about the Cambridge Analytica breach, a 24-year-old self-described “gay Canadian vegan” named Christopher Wylie created what he calls “Steve Bannon’s psychological warfare mindf*ck tool.” That psychological warfare tool was a complex data-mining/analysis/manipulation program used “to bring big data and social media to an established military methodology — ‘information operations’ — then turn it on the US electorate,” [according](#) to Wylie’s interview with *The Guardian*.



That “psychological warfare mindf*ck tool” was used to harvest the personal data of *at least* 50 million Facebook users and target them with posts, ads, and subtle “information” designed to manipulate their vote in the primaries. Far from a wild claim, Wylie has the paper trail to prove it. As this writer wrote at the time: “So, it appears that Team Trump did what the Right has rightly condemned Team Clinton for doing: manipulated personal data to win the White House. Only this time, there appears to be documented proof.”

And while partisan politics serve to divide people — causing many to defend actions of their party that they would condemn if done by the other party — the truth is that if it was wrong when the Left did it, it was wrong for the Right to do it. Put another way, it was wrong when Team Clinton did it *and* it was wrong when Team Trump did it. But — and this is important — it was wrong when Team Obama did it first. And the liberal mainstream media’s silence on that point is conspicuous.

As *Investor’s Business Daily* accurately pointed out:

Facebook now faces myriad legal actions for its apparent misuse of private data on its members. But one possible legal problem that isn’t getting any attention involves whether Facebook made, and the Obama campaign accepted, illegal “in-kind” contributions to Obama’s 2012 re-election effort.

While there are some similarities between the Obama campaign’s use of Facebook user data in the 2012 election and the Trump campaign’s use of Facebook user data in the 2016 primaries, there are some major differences, too. As this writer reported in that previous article, Facebook was misled into



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providing the data to Cambridge Analytica. After all, the social-media giant would not likely have willingly assisted Team Trump for any price.

Even the creator of the “psychological warfare mindf*ck tool” used to accomplish the Trump campaign’s manipulation of voters took umbrage to his creation being used to help Trump. Wylie appears to be fine with harvesting the data of millions of Facebook users without their consent (or even knowledge, for that matter) and using it to manipulate their votes. He just seems to take exception to that tool being used to help elect the likes of Donald Trump. Wylie had left the company before it helped the Trump campaign. Cambridge Analytica obtained the Facebook data of *at least* 50 million users by simple means: deception. Again, from the previous article by this writer:

So, Wylie had built the weapon, but didn’t have the ammunition. The simplest answer was to get it from the platform that has data on almost every millennial and most boomers: Facebook. According to former employees of the company, Cambridge Analytica paid a third-party researcher to acquire the data from Facebook. The pricetag was over \$1 million. Facebook says that researcher told the social-media giant that the data was for an academic study. In that one breach alone, Cambridge Analytica mined the data of more than 50 million Facebook users.

Wylie, who knew all along about what Cambridge Analytica was doing — after all, he built the tool — blew the whistle only once he learned that the company had used the data-mining and manipulation tool to help Team Trump.

Furthermore, according to publicly available information, the Trump campaign was no longer using Cambridge Analytica as a “consultant” by the time of the general election, so while the manipulation of the private data of millions of voters goes a long way toward explaining how the general election came down to Trump and Clinton, it had no impact whatsoever on Trump’s electoral victory or Clinton’s embarrassing defeat.

On the other hand, during the 2012 general election, President Obama had nearly unhindered access to Facebook data due to a Facebook app developed by the Obama campaign. So, whereas the Trump campaign used data harvested by Cambridge Analytica under false pretenses, the Obama campaign created its own data-mining app with Facebook’s full knowledge.

As *Investor’s Business Daily* [reported](#) last month:

In 2012, the Obama campaign encouraged supporters to download an Obama 2012 Facebook app that, when activated, let the campaign collect Facebook data both on users and their friends.

According to a July 2012 MIT *Technology Review* article, when you installed the app, “it said it would grab information about my friends: their birth dates, locations, and ‘likes.’”

The campaign boasted that more than a million people downloaded the app, which, given an average friend-list size of 190, means that as many as 190 million had at least some of their Facebook data vacuumed up by the Obama campaign — *without their knowledge or consent*.

If anything, Facebook made it easy for Obama to do so. A former campaign director, Carol Davidsen, tweeted that “Facebook was surprised we were able to suck out the whole social graph, but they didn’t stop us once they realized that was what we were doing.”

Furthermore, the Obama app gave the campaign the keys to the kingdom, allowing it to reach out to influence those who had not shown any support for Obama. And as far as manipulation goes, one method for accomplishing that influence was targeted campaign communications that were made to



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look like messages and posts from people users were “friends” with on Facebook.

The Obama campaign did not deny or try to hide any of this, by the way. In fact, they boasted of its effectiveness, calling it “the most groundbreaking piece of technology developed for the campaign.” Teddy Goff, the Obama campaign’s digital director, went so far as to say that the manipulation was both necessary and effective because “People don’t trust campaigns. They don’t even trust media organizations.”

No wonder.

Goff went on to ask and answer, “Who do they trust? Their friends.” So, by disguising campaign ads as “messages” from “friends,” Team Obama manipulated Facebook users in a way that makes what Team Trump did look almost honest by comparison. Almost. Because integrity shouldn’t be measured by degrees.

Of course, as mentioned above, the biggest difference between the mining and manipulation of Facebook users’ data by the Obama campaign and the Trump campaign has nothing to do with either campaign and everything to do with Facebook. The company has cried foul over the Cambridge Analytica breach, but was a willing participant in the Obama app breach.

And while Facebook is fully deserving of the beating it is taking over the Cambridge Analytica breach, it was at least as deserving of the same consequences in 2012. That didn’t happen because — at least in part — the media celebrated the Obama campaign’s shrewdness in getting its message out to a digital generation.

Mining and manipulating users’ personal information was wrong in 2012 and it was wrong in 2016. Partisan politics only muddies the water of the clear truth that wrong is always wrong. Both Obama and Trump should be held to the same standard.

And that standard should be demonstrated by voters who shame them into better behavior. Nothing else seems to.



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