



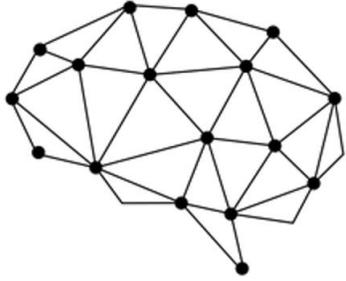
THE RISE OF PLATFORM EMPIRES: SOCIALITY AS MASS DECEPTION

Living in the Age of Surveillance Capitalism, University of Glasgow

Overview



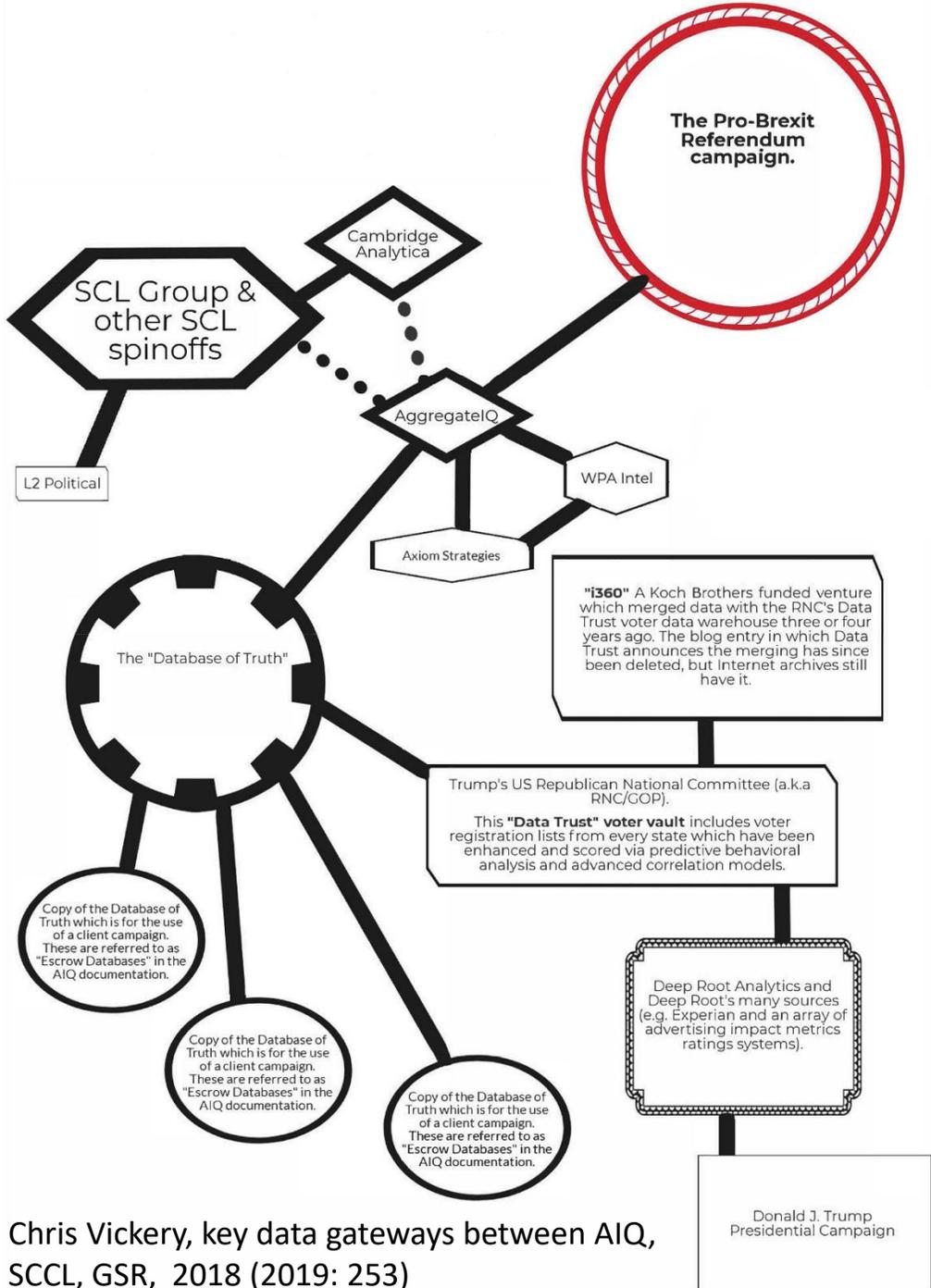
- Cambridge Analytica
- Standard ‘social’ business model: mass data extraction and collection
- ‘Sociality’ as mass deception
 - Historical precedents in mass entertainment
 - Shift to datafication and social platforms
 - Platform logics hide economic coercion in sociality
- The rise of platform empires



Cambridge Analytica



- Data driven political consulting and commercial marketing firm, linked with Steve Bannon
- This is your digital life (2015) collected data from Amazon Turk workers and their friends (87m)
- Targeted campaigning and elections
 - Used in Donald Trump's election campaign
 - Leave.EU data sharing with Eldon Insurance for targeted political campaigns and mailings (140-147)
 - Aggregate IQ and Ripon tool



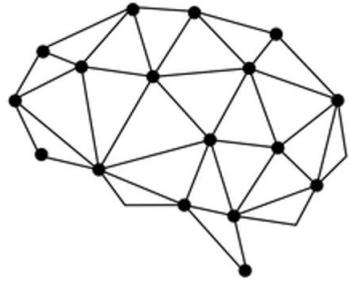
Chris Vickery, key data gateways between AIQ, SCCL, GSR, 2018 (2019: 253)

- Data harvesting
 - Vote Leave £50m prediction competition
 - Facebook Pixel and managed social ads
 - LinkedIn profile scraper
 - Republican National Committee and Ted Cruz campaign databases

- ‘The Database of Truth’ used for hypertargeted political campaigning

- Complex web of relationships
 - Permeability between AIQ, SCL/Cambridge Analytica and others

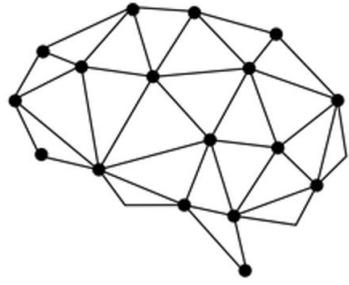
- Mostly legal, hugely unethical – leads to an urgent call for electoral, platform, and advertising regulation reform



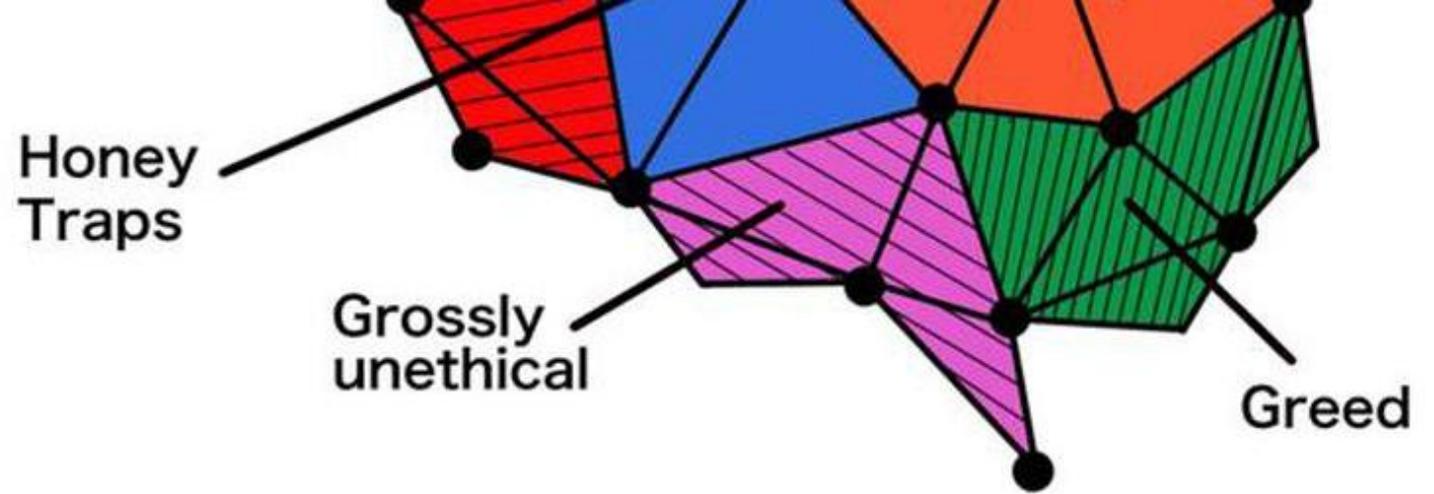
Cambridge
Analytica



“We consider that data transfer for value is Facebook’s business model and that Mark Zuckerberg’s statement that ‘we’ve never sold anyone’s data” is simply untrue’ ” (UK Parliament, 2019: 134).



Cambridge Analytica



Disinformation and 'fake news': Final Report, UK Parliament (Feb 2019)

Facebook and big tech behave like “digital gangsters”

Calls for:

- Increased platform liabilities and the end of tech self-regulation
- Compulsory code of ethics and independent regulation
- Legal and electoral reform

Business as usual: Data extraction the norm, not the exception



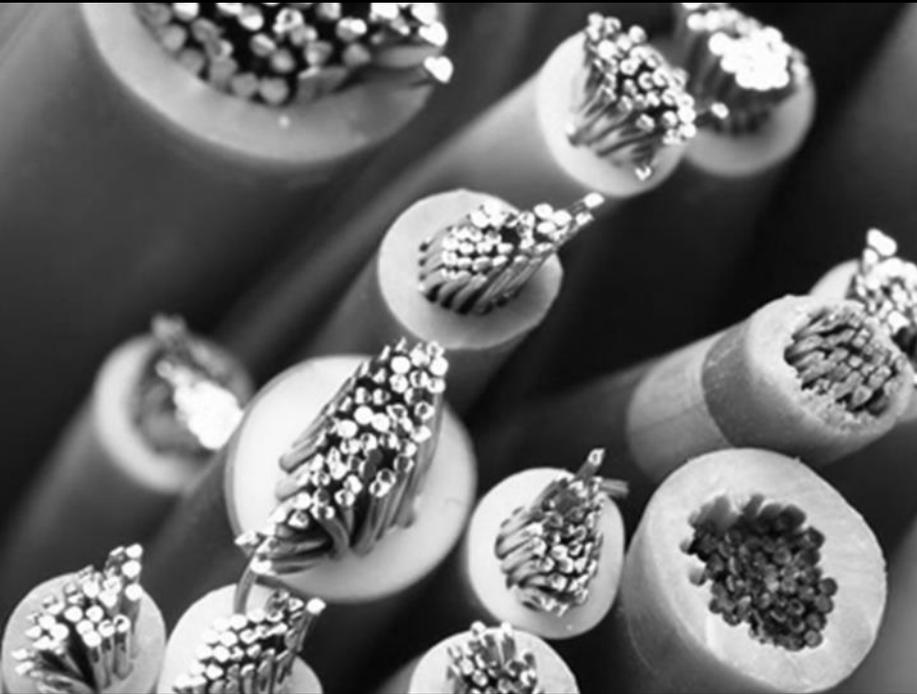
- From Cambridge Analytica to Emerdata
- Data extraction, data mining, profiling and targeted advertising/campaigning core digital practices
 - *“Friend permissions”*
 - *Whitelisting good clients and strangling competition*
 - *Lookalike audiences*
- Legal gaps and loopholes (big tech, strategic communication companies, inferred data)
- Growth of data monopolies

Entertainment as Mass Deception



- Historic precedents in mass entertainment
 - “Amusement under late capitalism is the prolongation of work”
 - *Culture “amalgamates with advertising.* The more meaningless the latter seems to be under a monopoly, the more omnipotent it becomes. The motives are markedly economic”
 - “Freedom to choose an ideology... proves to be freedom to choose what is always the same” (Adorno & Horkheimer 2005 [1944])
- Deception is disguising economic coercion as cultural expression

Sociality as Mass Deception



- “Facebook’s mission is to give people the power to build community and bring the world closer together”
- Social media are not about ‘social’ media but about surveillance capitalism
 - New logic of accumulation based on human data extraction “behavioural futures markets” (Zuboff 2019)
 - Programmed sociality (Bucher 2018)
 - Every click, like, link, browse, view is monetizable

Data Colonialism



“Just as historical **colonialism** over the long-run provided the essential preconditions for the emergence of industrial capitalism, so over time, we can expect that data colonialism will provide the preconditions for a **new stage of capitalism** that as yet we can barely imagine, but for which the appropriation of **human life through data** will be central” (Couldry and Meijas 2018).

The Rise of Platform Empires



- Surveillance capitalism + data colonialism
- Intensive and extensive
 - Ideological, economic, social, political, cultural
 - Local and global
 - Structural and personal
- Empires – *extensive spheres of activity* controlled by one person or group
- Platform empires – extensive ecosystems of activities

“Platforms also seek to build up ecosystems of goods and services that **close off competitors: apps that only work with Android, services that require Facebook logins**” (Srnicek 2017: 96)

Conclusion



- Cambridge Analytica reveals
 - Complex platform structures and emergence of information operations
 - Compression of economic relations into algorithmic culture
 - Wide-scale surveillance, data harvesting and hypernudging
- Sociality as mass deception
- Social media are rising platform empires
 - “Freemium” model for extensive data harvesting
 - Facebook (like GAFA) not a social platform, but data factories for advertisers
 - Whitelisting and strangling competitors
 - New markets and industries



Thank-you

Select references

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