FACEBOOK

Zuckerberg asked to testify; data firm's CEO suspended

By DANICA KIRKA AND GREGORY KATZ Associated Press

LONDON — The head of Trump-affiliated data-mining firm Cambridge Analytica has been suspended, while government authorities are bearing down on both the firm and Facebook over allegations the firm stole data from 50 million Facebook users to manipulate elections.

Cambridge's board of directors suspended CEO Alexander Nix pending an investigation after Nix boasted of various unsavory services to an undercover reporter for Britain's Channel 4 News.

Channel 4 News broadcast clips Tuesday that also show Nix saying his data-mining firm played a major role in securing Donald Trump's victory in the 2016 presidential elections.

Nix said the firm handled "all the data, all the analytics, all the targeting" and said Cambridge used emails with a "self-destruct timer" to make its role more difficult to trace.

"There's no evidence, there's no paper trail, there's nothing," he said.

In a statement, Cambridge's board said Nix's comments "do not represent the values or operations of the firm and his suspension reflects the seriousness with which we view this violation."

Cambridge has denied wrongdoing, and Trump's campaign has said it didn't use Cambridge's data.

Facebook also drew continued criticism for its alleged inaction to protect users' privacy. Earlier Tuesday, the chairman of the U.K. parliamentary media committee, Damian Collins, said his group has repeatedly asked Facebook how it uses data. He said Facebook officials "have been misleading to the committee."

The committee summoned Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg to testify.

"It is now time to hear from a senior Facebook executive with the sufficient authority to give an accurate account of this catastrophic failure of process," Collins wrote Zuckerberg. "Given your commitment at the start of the



Chief executive of Cambridge Analytica Alexander Nix leaves the offices in central London Tuesday. Cambridge Analytica has been accused of improperly using information from more than 50 million Facebook accounts. It denies wrongdoing.

New Year to 'fixing' Facebook, I hope that this representative will be you."

Leading Democrats in the U.S. Senate also called on Zuckerberg to testify. Sen. Dianne Feinstein of California, the top Democrat on the Senate Judiciary Committee, called Facebook's latest privacy scandal a "danger signal." She wants Zuckerberg's assurances that Facebook is prepared to take the lead on security measures that protect people's privacy — or Congress may step in.

Facebook sidestepped questions on whether Zuckerberg would appear, saying instead that it's currently focused on conducting its own reviews.

The request to appear comes as Britain's information commissioner said she was using all her legal powers to investigate the social media giant and Cambridge Analytica.

Commissioner Elizabeth Denham is pursuing a warrant to search Cambridge Analytica's servers. She has also asked Facebook to cease its own audit of Cambridge Analytica's data use.

"Our advice to Facebook is to back away and let us go in and do our work," she said.

Facebook has weathered many such blow-ups before and is used to apologizing and moving on. But the stakes are bigger this time. The latest scandal has some people reconsidering their relationship status with the social network, though there isn't much of anywhere else to go.

Cambridge Analytica said it is committed to helping the U.K. investigation. However, Denham's office said the firm failed to meet a deadline to produce the information requested.

Denham said the prime allegation against Cambridge Analytica is that it acquired personal data in an unauthorized way, adding that the data provisions act requires services like Facebook to have strong safeguards against misuse of data.

Chris Wylie, who once worked for Cambridge Analytica, was quoted as saying the company used the data to build psychological profiles so voters could be targeted with ads and stories.

Wylie has agreed to be interviewed by Democrats on the U.S. House Intelligence Committee. A date has not been set, and it's unclear if Republicans on the panel will attend.

Cambridge Analytica found itself in further allegations of wrongdoing. Britain's Channel 4 used an undercover investigation to record Nix saying that the company could use unorthodox methods to wage successful political campaigns for clients.

In footage released Monday, Nix said the company could "send some girls" around to a rival candidate's house, suggesting that girls from Ukraine are beautiful and effective in this role.

Breaking up with Facebook? It's harder than it looks

By BARBARA ORTUTAY AP Technology Writer

NEW YORK` — Facebook's latest privacy scandal, involving Trump campaign consultants who allegedly stole data on tens of millions of users in order to influence elections, has some people reconsidering their relationship status with the social network.

There's just one problem: There isn't much of anywhere else to go.

Facebook has weathered many such blow-ups before and is used to apologizing and moving on. But the stakes are bigger this time.

Regulatory authorities are starting to focus on the data misappropriation, triggering a 9 percent decline in Facebook's normally high-flying stock since Monday. Some of that reflects fear that changes in Facebook's business will hurt profits or that advertisers and users will sour on the social network.

The furor over Cambridge Analytica, the data mining firm accused of stealing Facebook data, follows a bad year in which Facebook acknowledged helping spread fake news and propaganda from Russian agents. It also comes less than three months after CEO Mark Zuckerberg told the world that he would devote the year to fixing Facebook. Instead, things seem to be getting worse.

"It's more serious economically, politically, financially and will require a more robust response in order to regain users' trust," said Steve Jones, a professor of communications at the University of Illinois at Chicago.

of Illinois at Chicago. Yet leaving Facebook, like ending a long marriage, isn't remotely simple. Starting with the little things.

Arvind Rajan, a tech executive from San Francisco who deactivated his account on Monday, suddenly discovered he needs to create new usernames and passwords for a variety of apps and websites. That's because he previously logged in with his Facebook ID.

It's a pain, he said, "but not the end of the world." And because he is bothered by Facebook's "ham-handed" response to recent problems, the inconvenience is worth it.

For other users looking to leave,

it can feel as if there are no real alternatives. Twitter? Too flighty, too public. Instagram? Whoops, owned by Facebook. Snapchat? Please, unless you're under 25 — in which case you're probably not on Facebook to begin with.

Facebook connects 2.2 billion users and a host of communities that have sprung up on its network. No other company can match the breadth or depth of these connections — thanks in part to Facebook's proclivity for squashing or swallowing up its competition.

But it is precisely in Facebook's interest to make users feel Facebook is the only place to connect with others. Where else will grandmothers see photos of their far-flung grandkids? How will new mothers connect to other parents also up at 4 a.m. with a newborn?

"My only hesitation is that there are hundreds of pictures posted over 13 years of my life that I do not want to lose access to. If there was a way to recover these photos, I would deactivate immediately," Daniel Schwartz, who lives in Atlanta, said in an email.

People eager to delete their profiles may find unexpected problems that point to how integral Facebook is to many activities, said Ifeoma Ajunwa, a professor of organizational behavior at Cornell University.

"It is getting more and more difficult for people to delete Facebook, since it's not just as a social media platform but also almost like a meeting square," she said. Parents could soon realize that

Parents could soon realize that their child's soccer schedule with games and pickup times is only on a Facebook page, for example. Many businesses also schedule meetings via Facebook.

"It's more and more difficult for people to feel plugged in if you're not on Facebook," Ajunwa said.

Not surprisingly, Facebook doesn't make it easy to leave. To permanently delete your account, you need to make a request to the company. The process can take several days, and if you log in during this time, your request will be canceled. It can take up to 90 days to delete everything.

There's a less permanent way to leave, deactivation, which hides your profile from everyone but lets you return if you change your mind.





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