

'The Great Hack': Manipulating people with their own data



CHENNAI: One of the greatest concerns of this century is the growing threat to privacy. They may not admit it, but many countries — not just those run by dictatorial regimes — are now making it their business to snoop into individuals' lives. “The Great Hack,” now streaming on Netflix, brilliantly documents this in feature length.

Made by Karim Amer and Jehane Noujaim (known for “Control Room” and “The Square,” which fetched an Academy nod), “The Great Hack” tells the story of British data-driven political consulting firm Cambridge Analytica, which used the Facebook data of millions of users to push Brexit and help Donald Trump win the US presidential election.

The documentary is no less thrilling than a political spy story with unforgettable characters. The company got hold of personal messages, photographs and more to shortlist those who were seen as “persuadable,” and they were bombarded with communication to nudge them toward Trump and Brexit. The movie calls this a psychological war.

“The Great Hack” begins with an American professor, David Carroll, who decides after it was revealed that Facebook data were being misused that he will ask Cambridge Analytica to hand over his personal information.

The take on Brittany Kaiser is even more gripping. An ex-intern who worked for former US President Barack Obama, she landed a job with Cambridge Analytica writing contracts for Trump and helping Brexit deals.

Pink-haired whistleblower Christopher Wylie makes up the trio that shook the world out of its Facebook fallacy.

Will “The Great Hack” lead to a mass exodus from Facebook? Hardly, one would think, because people are so besotted with sharing their most personal moments on the platform that they ignore how vulnerable they can be.

And mobile phones, which just about everybody uses today, often track their users’ every move.

But it is time to seriously ponder how we are naively bartering away our precious privacy for self-promotion among our friends, real and not so real.
