PRIVACY VERSUS PRODUCTS IN TARGETED DIGITAL ADVERTISING THE ETHICS OF CUSTOMIZED AD CAMPAIGNS

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Introduction

Over the last decade, targeting advertising has emerged as a key driver in the marketing and advertising space. Before recent innovations, advertising was usually pretty random and consumers simply saw what they came across. However, with the increase in technology and the use of computer algorithms and software, marketers can directly target consumers with ads based on their location, interests, buying habits and even mood. Obviously, these practices can be seen as invasive because of the large amount of information that is accumulated by marketing and advertising processes. This has led to privacy issues being brought to the surface and questions about what might be taken too far.

Targeted advertising has grown to be an essential aspect of our experiences using technology. With more access to information, consumers can find details about products on all sorts of corners of the internet. To some extent, targeted advertising benefits consumers by providing information and content that might be directly relevant for their needs or interests. However, the use of the technology creates a slippery slope as far as privacy goes online. The reading about Privacy uses examples that highlight how targeting advertising can have unintended consequences. Because of the mental and social harm that the practice has proven to cause, both experts and consumers are questioning if these techniques and systems are ethical.

Stakeholder Background And Analysis

With so many people across the world on the internet and using technology, the entire global population is a stakeholder when it comes to privacy and targeted advertising. For consumers of the internet, our data and information is collected every time we browse a new webpage online. With the spread of targeted advertising, we see the promotion of products that suit our needs based on the advanced algorithms and programs that break down information

online. While this may have a positive effect to some extent on consumers, there's an easy path to privacy issues when it comes to location, browsing and personal information.

Obviously, another stakeholder in the scheme of things are the large tech companies that are able to collect the data online. For instance, Google is able to gather all sorts of information about the browsing and usage habits of users across the globe. By existing as the leader in the internet space, Google has a wealth of information that they're able to monetize and grow. Companies that utilize Google's information and systems are able to better suit their marketing efforts to target customers efficiently.

In this case, any sort of company marketing a product is also a stakeholder when it comes to targeted advertising and privacy issues. Companies or organizations, like DePaul University, might utilize Google Ads or other platforms to specifically target certain demographics or users with patterns that align with the goals of the marketing strategy. While this might be an efficient way to create a more effective campaign, the use of targeting advertising can raise ethical questions. Down the road, it will be important for all marketers and advertising professionals to understand the impact that targeted advertising has and the best ethical practices to utilize the valuable tool.

Ethical Dilemma And Evaluation

When looking at the "Advertising Ethics and Principles", it seems like the targeted advertising phenomenon closely relates to the "comparison" and "taste and decency" principles. While it depends on the form of advertising, targeted advertising aims to directly expose potential customers to products that suit their demographic or needs. When doing this, it is important for the advertising to not make any misleading claims about competitors or other products. Also, taste and decency comes to mind when considering the intrusiveness of some

targeted ads. It's interesting to think about where the line of public decency lies when companies are collecting personal information to better target ads to consumers. If the public had more awareness that all browsing habits were being collected for advertising purposes, would citizens see that as crossing the line? This will be a complicated issue moving forward and the aspect of public decency will continue to have relevance as a primary ethical principle regarding the phenomenon.

In the case of targeted advertising, the ethical dilemma is obviously centered around privacy. With data being collected all over the internet, the main dilemma is how much is too much? In the privacy reading, it's explained that this data collection and targeted advertising can have implications beyond trying to sell a product to consumers. The information collected about users online can be used to better target fake news, misinformation and propaganda that can lead to civil unrest or conflict. For instance, even recently with the conflict in Ukraine, information on the internet could be targeted for users with certain search tendencies and preferences. While the use of targeting advertising to get a Nike fan to buy more shoes might not cause an ethical dilemma, the use of the information gathering could have real world effects on the spread of important information.

Besides the use of targeted advertising based on the collection of user data, there are plenty of advertising techniques that companies can implement in a world that is constantly online. For instance, email marketing isn't considered as invasive because of it's opt-in nature. Brands can push products, services and experiences directly to consumers who have willingly recognized that they should be targeted for the content. This is a way that marketers can target repeat customers and build a loyal following that is still interested in trying new products and offerings.

Targeted Advertising In Different Areas

Targeted advertising is a recent and effective means used by businesses to serve their ads primarily to a specific type of consumer that would most likely use or purchase the product. This is very enabled by the use of technology and gathering as much data as possible to predict and serve ads to both those who need it and those that don't.

An example of targeted advertising is political targeted advertising. Political advertising is a type of campaigning in which candidates can directly communicate their message/agenda to voters and influence the political debate, sometimes publicly belittling the opponent in hopes of whipping up votes. In recent years, targeted advertising was used in politics during the 2016 Presidential election, gathering and using unauthorized personal data of Facebook users. E-commerce businesses using social media to advertise to specific groups of people is also an area that has flourished beyond imagination.

Conflicting Interests And Controversies

There are many conspiracies, schools of thought and half-baked theories as to what interests but the most important on reasonable privacy vs unethical intrusion . The issue of targeted advertising is so controversial and spun to limelight as a result of the Facebook-Cambridge Analytica scandal where the Big tech giant crossed the line and breached data privacy protection laws which enabled Cambridge Analytica to acquire data from up to 87 million individuals globally without their knowledge and or consent. As a result, allegations of election tampering became big-time news.While the media does have a responsibility to tell the truth, there has been more frequent dissemination of misinformation over the last decade. When this duty falls into the laps of profit-driven corporations, there can be plenty of motives at play that can create misinformation in both a political and social context.

Data-driven Targeted Ads And Traditional Forms Of Advertising

Data-driven targeted ads can be described more like a ballpoint persuasion tactic as opposed to older forms that were more used car salesman-like. There is no argument as regards the tremendous advantage that this brings. One of the key differences between data-driven targeted ads and older forms of advertising is the amount of market research that goes into ensuring adequate personalization, which brings about aiding creative teams into making relevant messages for the right audience. It is almost like a ripple effect or chain reaction as targeting the right customers or prospects would allow people to meet products or services that they already care about. Looking from a brand point of view as well, data- driven targeted ads ensure efficient media buying and planning, because ad agencies know which medium the audience consumes most, it can influence and inform strategic buying. This significant advancement leverages algorithms and data to provide next to accurate information that would have taken marketers in older forms of advertising way more work.

Who Should Be Responsible For Protecting Information

With the recent political climate and unending whirlwind of data theft, stolen identity, unsolicited ads amongst others, user data protection is a two-way street. The burden of protecting information should be on both tech companies and individuals who are aware of their responsibility to protect their own data. Website users should be precautious of giving out personal data on sites and social media platforms. It's become second nature to quickly allow sites and apps to use our information. However, with more and more information and data getting out, it's now more important than ever to be mindful about the personal information you provide to any platform or database as you use the internet. Users should be careful with sharing

our cookies on sites and on platforms given what happened on the Facebook-Cambridge Analytica scandal.

Alternatives, Benefits And Aftermath Of Banning Targeted Advertising

It is sufficient to say that the concept of targeted advertising has come to say. Targeted advertising is the most effective type of advertising. The core aim of every advertisement endeavor is to maximize sales and bring about the highest possible return on investment. One aspect that summarily captures the essence of targeted advertising is Influencer Marketing. Influencer Marketing is a refreshing form of social media marketing that uses endorsements, paid product mentions and even the product placement in some cases testimonials from influencers–individuals who have a dedicated social following and presence and are viewed as experts within their chosen field.

With influencer marketing, people's personal data is not being tampered with, collected or stored up to the point where algorithms and artificial intelligence feed similar or closely related advertisements at every turn. Advertisers are still able to reach the capsule audience they so desire. Meanwhile, users are able to follow brands and influencers that directly align with their interests and needs. Consumers are simply "opting in" by following brands and marketers who push products that line up with their buying interests.

In the height of the Cambridge Analytica Scandal, Senator Orrin Hatch (now retired) asked how Facebook made money by running a free business, Mark Zuckerburg replied by running ads. The simplicity in his response shows how one of the largest pioneering tech company's business models operates almost exclusively on running targeted ads.

Banning targeted advertising would not necessarily make things better. Without targeting advertising, consumers would be left to sort through all kinds of advertising and information that

does not necessarily apply to them. While this would allow more freedom in decisions, online space would be filled with clutter. Targeted advertising allows companies to choose a narrow, but loyal and dependable audience. Without it, there would not be much direction for the content that users see online.

Conclusion

With such a quickly evolving world of data and information, the methods of targeted advertising will continue to grow. The information and habits for users online is a gold mine for advertisers, but going forward, it is recommended that public relations practitioners, advertisers go carefully. When utilizing the technology in marketing and advertising, companies and people in power need to act with ethical frameworks in mind. The industry seems like it is headed down a slippery slope and the future could hold key developments that draw barriers and boundaries to the type of information corporations and marketers are able to collect.

Discussion questions

- **How will the methods of targeting advertising change moving forward?**

- **What sort of ethical issue could lead to the halt of targeting advertising and the methods that companies use to collect data?**

- **In your personal experience, how has targeted advertising positively affected your experience as a consumer?**

- **In your opinion, what sort of information would be unethical to collect from consumers? What would you feel uncomfortable about companies collecting from you?**

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