

Facebook "Updates" Ad Targeting Strategy to Aim at GOP and away from DNC

by Tyler Durden

In a belated response to the ProPublica story, Facebook said it will remove its "self-reporting" ad tools...

"Facebook equips businesses with powerful ways to reach the right people with the right message. But there are restrictions on how audience targeting can be used on Facebook. Hate speech and discriminatory advertising have no place on our platform. Our community standards strictly prohibit attacking people based on their protected characteristics, including religion, and we prohibit advertisers from discriminating against people based on religion and other attributes.

As people fill in their education or employer on their profile, we have found a small percentage of people who have entered offensive responses, in violation of our policies. ProPublica surfaced that these offensive education and employer fields were showing up in our ads interface as targetable audiences for campaigns. We immediately removed them. Given that the number of people in these segments was incredibly low, an extremely small number of people were targeted in these campaigns.

Keeping our community safe is critical to our mission. And to help ensure that targeting is not used for discriminatory purposes, we are removing these self-reported targeting fields until we have the right processes in place to help prevent this issue. We want Facebook to be a safe place for people and businesses, and we'll continue to do everything we can to keep hate off Facebook.

Advertisers can report any inappropriate targeting fields directly in the ads interface or via our Help Center."

* * *

Facebook is having a rough couple of weeks...

Last week, Democrats and progressives who had once praised the company for promising to eradicate "fake news" on its platform were outraged by revelations that it had sold at least \$100,000 in advertising to a Russian troll farm – an allegation that Facebook had initially denied when it first surfaced in the spring. Lawmakers, including Democratic Senator Mark Warner demanded more information from the company, even speculating that Congress may need to pass legislation to "protect Americans" from malicious foreigners dedicated to subverting the American Democratic process by...purchasing targeted ads.

Now, ProPublica is reporting that Facebook's advertising algorithms inadvertently created a series of targeted-ad categories directed at anti-semites and racists. To test if these ad categories were real, ProPublica paid \$30 to target those groups with three "promoted posts" — in which a ProPublica article or post was displayed in their news feeds. Facebook approved all three ads within 15 minutes.

"Last week, acting on a tip, we logged into Facebook's automated ad system to see if "Jew hater" was really an ad category. We found it, but discovered that the category — with only 2,274 people in it — was too small for Facebook to allow us to buy an ad pegged only to Jew haters.

Facebook's automated system suggested "Second Amendment" as an additional category that would boost our audience size to 119,000 people, presumably because its system had correlated

gun enthusiasts with anti-Semites.

Instead, we chose additional categories that popped up when we typed in "jew h": "How to burn Jews," and "History of 'why jews ruin the world.'" Then we added a category that Facebook suggested when we typed in "Hitler": a category called "Hitler did nothing wrong." All were described as "fields of study."

Now, the company's advertising business is facing another scandal. According to ProPublica, the world's largest social network enabled advertisers to direct their pitches to the news feeds of almost 2,300 people who expressed interest in the topics of "Jew hater," "How to burn jews," or, "History of 'why jews ruin the world.'"

The company had continued with the targeted pitches until earlier this week, when ProPublica reporters shared their findings with Facebook's communications team.

"Until this week, when we asked Facebook about it, the world's largest social network enabled advertisers to direct their pitches to the news feeds of almost 2,300 people who expressed interest in the topics of "Jew hater," "How to burn jews," or, "History of 'why jews ruin the world.'"

Unsurprisingly, the company blamed the anti-Semitic ads on one of its algorithms and promised to fix the problem and make sure it never happens again.

"There are times where content is surfaced on our platform that violates our standards," said Rob Leathern, product management director at Facebook. "In this case, we've removed the associated targeting fields in question. We know we have more work to do, so we're also building new guardrails in our product and review processes to prevent other issues like this

from happening in the future.”

Most internet users prefer to conveniently ignore how platforms like Facebook and Google can afford to provide so many free services while still operating profitable businesses.

Of course, they’ve managed to do this by dominating the global market for advertising. Facebook and Google essentially Hoover up user data and feed it through to their algorithms, which perform complicated analyses to help develop a users’ demographic profile. The company’s platform then uses this information to target advertisements that might be more relevant to their interests. The purported efficacy of these tactics has allowed Facebook to muscle out traditional purveyors of advertising – like media companies – with whom it is now attempting to formulate an uneasy partnership.

Following the attack in Charlottesville, Va. last month, when a young woman was killed and dozens were injured after an Ohio man who had attended a White Nationalist rally on the campus of the University of Virginia rammed his car onto a crowd of counter-protesters.

Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg wrote at the time that “there is no place for hate in our community” and promised to purge such speech from Facebook.

“It’s a disgrace that we still need to say that neo-Nazis and white supremacists are wrong - as if this is somehow not obvious,” he wrote.

But, as ProPublica points out, the company, while it may have deleted a some questionable posts, it didn’t apply any scrutiny to its ad-buying platform. The ad categories that ProPublica spotted were likely generated after scraping data from profiles featuring anti-Semitic themes - either as an interest, an employer or a “field of study.” Facebook’s algorithm

automatically transforms people's declared interests into advertising categories.

ProPublica has been scrutinizing Facebook's advertising business for years. Last year, it collected a list of 29,000 ad categories from Facebook's ad system — and found categories ranging from an interest in "Hungarian sausages" to "People in households that have an estimated household income of between \$100K and \$125K."

The report didn't appear to have much of an impact on the company's share price, which was flat in early trading.

Tech companies' advertising businesses are generating billions of dollars in revenue, and yet – as the ProPublica investigation demonstrates – there's little transparency surrounding how the Facebooks, Amazons and Googles of the world repurpose user data for commercial purposes.

Perhaps when he is done cracking just how an (allegedly) Russian \$100,000 ad campaign changed the course of US election history. Mark Warner can look into this.

Transparency

Google

Ohio

20,372

132

Comment viewing options

Select your preferred way to display the comments and click

"Save settings" to activate your changes.

hedgeless_horseman Sep 15, 2017 11:13 AM

There are jew haters on Facebook?

Mr.BlingBling hedgeless_horseman Sep 15, 2017 11:17 AM
The "Whitey All be NAZI's" algorithm will remain unchanged.