Targeted Ads

In This Module

- What is targeted advertising? Why does it matter?

- How does targeted advertising work?

- Why it is so common online?

Targeted Ads

Targeted ads are ads that are aimed at a certain demographic group. Targeted ads are a key feature of much of our online experiences and they are made possible by the amount of data we often generate about ourselves online

Targeted ads are growing in scale and sophistication as data collection practices allow ads to target increasingly specific groups of people, even individuals

Discussion

What do you think of targeted ads?

Do you find them useful or intrusive or something else?

Implications of Targeted Ads

The internet is fueled by ads. Ads are how major tech companies make money. Speaking generally, all those "free" sites you use aren't as free as they seem. Your data helps to fuel advertisers and make these sites money.

Because ads are so central to the internet, many sites encourage you, subtly or overtly, to make your data available or to do things like accept cookies.

Implications of Targeted Ads

Targeted ads can also lead to isolation and can have impact on our self-perception. Since we all see different ads, we can't always compare what we are seeing with others or discuss it and get other opinions.

Implications of Targeted Ads

Regulators are increasingly looking at targeted ads since they can:

- Pose privacy concerns
- Target vulnerable populations
- Show material that might be harmful to certain groups (i.e. as ads that encourage unhealthy body images aimed at young girls)

Implications of Targeted Ads

There are definite ways to manage online ads and your online privacy. It can take awareness and effort to manage these settings.

Increasingly, many sites allow you to learn about the ads you are seeing and learn what these ads know about you. This is thanks to acts like the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) that was passed in Europe in 2018.

Benefits of Targeted Ads

Targeted online ads often show you relevant products and information.

Instead of just a random ad, you might see something you are actually interested in learning more about or purchasing.

Benefits of Targeted Ads

If a targeted ad knows you like to shop at a certain site, you might get information about sales or deals that you are actually interested in seeing.

Privacy Issues in Targeted Ads

Targeted ads can feel creepy and invasive. You might be casually browsing a site and, next thing you know, you get bombarded with ads for similar products.

Aside from the sometimes intrusive results, the tracking that targeted ads engage in can feel alarming and uncomfortable.

Privacy Issues in Targeted Ads

Online ads can sometimes make alarmingly accurate guesses or assumptions about you based on your search history, online activity, and profiles.

Depending on your online activity you might receive ads related to personal events like a pregnancy, a proposal, or a move before you've even told people you know!

Activity

Pull up a social media site that you use often and make note of the first few ads that appear

What are you seeing? Why do you think you saw this ad? Share your observations!

Takeaways

- Ads are, in many ways, what power the internet and your data and information is central to the targeted ad economy and ecosystem
- While targeted ads can show you relevant things, the tracking and personal data that these ads rely upon can often feel creepy and invasive
- Being aware of how targeted ads work can help you be more alert to the ads you are seeing and more likely to question what you are seeing. Being critical and thoughtful about the ads you are seeing can be empowering and is a key part of digital literacy and digital security

Resources

"The Role of Data in the Targeted Advertising Industry" from New America ([link](#))

"Ads That Don't Overstep" in *Harvard Business Review* ([link](#))

"Now It's Personal: How Knowing an Ad Is Targeted Changes Its Impact" from *Yale Insights* ([link](#))

Questions?

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