

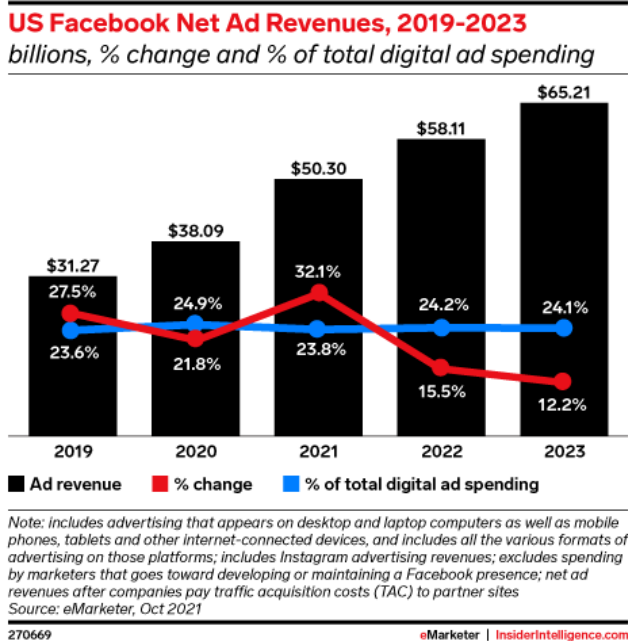
Meta's ad targeting may be producing inaccurate results, study suggests

Article

The news: Facebook's ad targeting may be producing inaccurate results. A new study from North Carolina State University found that Facebook's user profiling system, which tracks behavior to determine users' interests and serve targeted ads, resulted in irrelevant or incorrect interests around 29% of the time.

More on this: North Carolina State University’s [study](#) used a small sample—only 146 test accounts—but its results cast further doubt on the effectiveness of Facebook and Meta’s already fraught ad delivery systems.

- Researchers found that simple actions like scrolling through a page once often resulted in targeted advertising. Facebook would also often make incorrect identifications—in one example, visiting the page for Apple Inc. resulted in the fruit being labeled as an interest.
- Even negative actions resulted in incorrect labels. In another example, a user who left a negative comment on a “Harry Potter” post had the franchise and its stars marked as interests.
- The study is another blow to Facebook’s advertising services, which have struggled to adapt to changes to Apple’s Identifier for Advertisers and the deprecation of browser cookies. Last fall, Meta revealed that an undetected ad bug meant results were [incorrectly reported](#) for months. Pressure from regulators about privacy also led the platform to [remove the ability](#) to target ads based on a user’s race or political opinions, further weakening the feature.



Meta’s response: Sensing anxiety from brand partners, Meta has taken steps to restore faith in its advertising ability, such as [enabling brands to choose](#) where their ads are placed. But a recent story from The Washington Post shows Meta is also trying to draw negative attention to competitors to diminish from its own.

- The Post found that Meta had hired conservative consulting firm Targeted Victory to drum up negativity around **TikTok**. Through a series of op-eds and fake controversies about “challenges” on the apps, Meta sought to “get the message out that while Meta is the current punching bag, TikTok is the real threat...” according to emails obtained by The Post.
- Evidence of the campaign goes as far back as February (before Meta had its own scandal about teens on **Instagram**), and it seems it was effective. TikTok published a report looking to dispel panic around teen safety and viral challenges in November, and even The Post itself published stories about now-debunked challenges like the “Slap a Teacher TikTok Challenge,” as Targeted Victory CEO Zac Moffatt pointed out on Twitter.

Looking forward: Meta may have succeeded in drawing negative attention to TikTok, but there’s no worming its way out of long-standing issues. With its smear campaign out in the open and yet another issue with its advertising products, Meta will have to find a long-term solution to appease advertisers.