

Facebook revamps policy after report on anti-Semitic targeting

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Facebook says it is blocking the ability of advertiser to reach people categorized as anti-Semitic after a news report which showed messages could be targeted to "Jew haters"

Facebook said it was revising its advertising policies to prevent "discriminatory" targeting after a news report showed marketers could aim messages at categories of people such as "Jew haters."

The world's biggest social network announced the change after the nonprofit investigative news site Pro Publica on Thursday revealed how advertisers could target messages to demographic categories including anti-Semitic users.

Facebook product manager Rob Leathern said Friday that the company had changed its ad targeting policy after learning about the report, saying these messages represented "hate speech" prohibited by Facebook.

"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," Leathern said in a statement to AFP.

"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."

Google ads too

Separately Friday, Google said it was re-examining its ad targeting process after a BuzzFeed report indicating how messages could be delivered to users based on racist or bigoted search terms such as "evil Jew."

"Our goal is to prevent our keyword suggestions tool from making offensive suggestions, and to stop any offensive ads appearing," a Google statement said.

Google indicated that despite the suggestions, the majority of the ads did not get approved for distribution.

"We didn't catch all these offensive suggestions," Google said. "We've

already turned off these suggestions, and any ads that made it through, and will work harder to stop this from happening again."

Google indicated that, helped by its software, it rejected some 1.5 billion ads last year that violated its standards, and said it consistently reviews its efforts to block offensive ads.

The Pro Publica team said that, acting "on a tip," it had logged into Facebook's automated ad system and discovered "Jew hater" as an ad category, with 2,274 people in it (they had expressed interest in topics like "How to burn Jews" and "History of 'why Jews ruin the world'").

Because targeted ads are not sold for such small groups, the automated system suggested the category "Second Amendment"—the right under the US Constitution to bear arms—as an additional category. Its system had correlated gun enthusiasts with anti-Semites.

The report said the anti-Semitic categories were created by algorithm rather than by people, based on information Facebook users supply in their profiles and other data.

BuzzFeed said it typed in "White people ruin," as a potential advertising keyword into Google's ad platform, and saw suggestions such as "black people ruin neighborhoods." Type "Why do Jews ruin everything," and Google suggested running ads next to searches including "the evil jew" and "jewish control of banks."

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