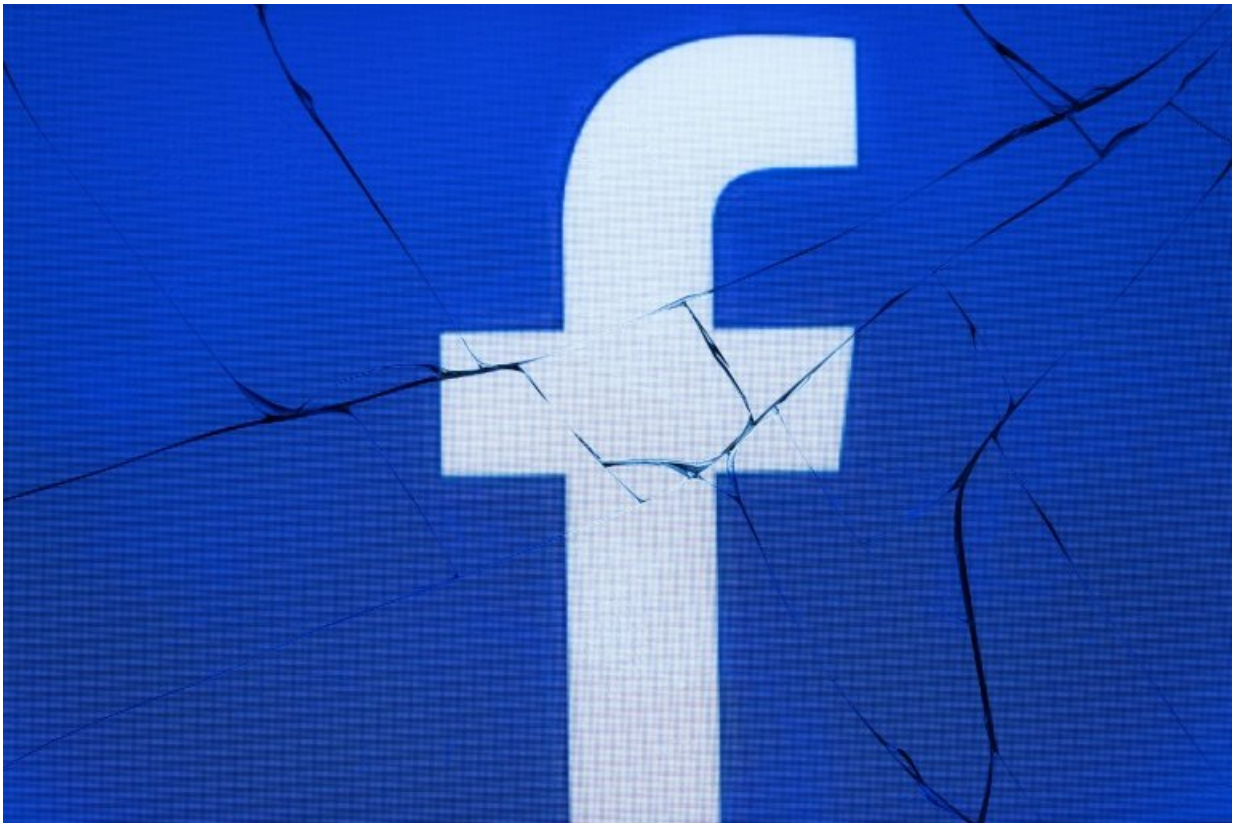


Facebook cuts ad-target options to thwart discrimination

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Facebook is eliminating the ability to target ads based on certain criteria such as race or ethnic affiliation amid concerns this could lead to discrimination

Facebook said Tuesday it is cutting more than 5,000 ad-targeting options to prevent advertisers from discriminating based on traits such as

religion or race.

The shift eliminates the ability to direct Facebook ads at people based on ethnicity, beliefs, political affinity or other data that could be considered sensitive or personal.

"While these options have been used in legitimate ways to reach people interested in a certain product or service, we think minimizing the risk of abuse is more important," the leading online social network said in an online post.

The announcement came less than a week after the US Department of Housing and Urban Development accused Facebook of breaking the law by letting landlords and home sellers use its ad-targeting system to discriminate against potential buyers or tenants.

A formal complaint filed by HUD contended that Facebook advertisers were able to target offers of homes available for rent or sale based on factors such as race, religion, gender, nationality or disabilities.

"We're committed to protecting people from discriminatory advertising on our platforms," Facebook said.

Some media reports this year noted that advertisers could choose to target ads at African Americans, Hispanics or other demographic groups—or exclude them, to effectively market products or services to whites.

Most of the terms removed were in a category that let advertisers designate who they wanted excluded from seeing marketing messages.

For example, Facebook advertisers can no longer opt to prevent ads from being shown to user who have expressed interest in topics such as

Passover, Islam, Buddhism or Native American culture.

Facebook added that all US advertisers will need to certify that they accept the social network's non-discrimination policy. Previously, the compliance certification was required only of those posting housing, employment or credit ads.

The certification is intended to educate advertisers regarding "the difference between acceptable ad targeting and ad discrimination," according to the social network.

Facebook planned to eventually expand the measure to more countries, but provided no timeline and insisted the move was not a reaction to the HUD complaint.

"No, we've been building these tools for a long time and collecting input from different outside groups," a Facebook spokesman said of the notion.

The HUD complaint filed on Friday came after an investigation confirmed that advertisers on Facebook could exclude categories such as people who expressed interest in assistance dogs, parenting, China or the Bible, according to the agency.

Facebook prohibits discrimination and has strengthened its systems during the past year to protect against advertisers misusing targeting capabilities, a spokesman told AFP.

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