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The Morality of Advertising and Ad-Blocking

The first ad ever posted to the internet came on October 27th, 1994. This began one of the most common practices for advertisers in the 21st century. Since then, the number of advertisements on the internet has grown exponentially. A market research firm called Yankelovich did a study in 2007 that concluded we are exposed to around 5000 advertisements per day. This number has only gone up in the age of the internet and will continue to grow at alarming rates. I argue that adblocking under any circumstance is not only justified but should be encouraged. Advertising is only acceptable if done in a completely non-intrusive manner, without targeting a demographic, without using dangerous marketing techniques like brainwashing, without tricking or misleading the user in any way, and takes the user to a high quality product.

Not only are most ads on the internet intrusive and annoying, but marketers are also using psychological strategies to bury products deep into your subconscious. “Similar to brainwashing, certain techniques in advertising can compel a person’s brain to build associations it wouldn’t normally make” (Blake). Marketers’ jobs are dependent on getting people to click their ads by any means necessary. The only effective way to get users to click on an ad consistently is by being more intrusive than the other ads on the page. This leads to a competition between advertisers on how to make the user experience even worse.

Another extremely useful benefit to using an adblocker is the removal of malvertising. Anytime a website knowingly or unknowingly uploads advertisements that contain malicious intentions, thousands if not millions of computers are put at risk. This fact alone should be justification enough for the widespread use of ad-blockers. “While publishers are aware of the problem, they find it difficult to test for or block malicious ads.” (Malvertising).

The most common argument against the use of ad-blocking is the idea that people need to be compensated for working hard to maintain a website and produce content. I do agree that people should be able to make money from producing good content on the internet, what I do not agree with is the idea that advertising is the only sustainable way of achieving that goal. Websites like twitch.tv are heavily monetized by a gifting economy rather than an advertising economy; meaning if a user likes a creator’s content, they decide to donate money to them. This sounds good on paper, but can people actually make money from creating entertaining or insightful content through donations? Yes. In a recent revenue leak from the website, the top earner on twitch (through mostly out of pocket donations) made over nine million dollars through the website alone (meaning no sponsorships or 3rd party payouts).

The most recent scandal in advertising is the use of targeted advertisements in which companies will pay for user’s information to better select who they will send their ads out to. This is beyond unethical and has invaded millions of people’s privacy without their consent.

So in conclusion, Ad-blockers are not only the convenient option, but also the safest and most practical. In a world where marketers are constantly trying to exploit human psychology, target you based on digital surveillance, and put products in your head without your consent, ad-blockers are our path to a better future.

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