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Digital Advertising in the Modern Age

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“If you aren’t paying for a service then you are the product”. Today in class we watched a BBC documentary that outlined many of the horrifying details as to how digital marketing players use behavioural targeting to learn everything about us. While Google’s old company slogan of “Don’t be evil” is slightly troubling, I find that the Adsense platform isn’t nearly as terrifying as that of Facebook and Instagram. Mark Zuckerberg, the alien-lizzard-human hybrid seems to act without any sort of sense of moral decency when it comes to data collection, because so much of what they do tends to terrify people. Netflix using Cinemax to learn about people’s viewing preferences doesn’t shake a stick at Facebook and Instagram.

Today’s connected teens spend absurd amounts of time using Instagram, and in the process Instagram and Facebook learn what content spikes their user’s dopamine levels. As if that’s not enough, unlike other players like Google, Instagram and Facebook monitor your mobile devices microphones via third party apps, and target ads to you based on keywords that they hear. Zuckerberg has claimed that they do not do this, yet once my ex-girlfriend had mentioned that she was born via artificial insemination, and then for the following month I received hundreds of artificial insemination ads with headlines such as “Trying to have a baby?”. I wish that this was a one-off strange story, but there are thousands of stories like this one documented by many others across the internet. Terrifying stuff, and completely unethical that they lie about it.