\*\*\*\*\* This is not a political post, merely a look into how effective data mining can be. \*\*\*\*\*

Data mining is described as the process of sorting through large sets of information to identify patterns and establish relationships to solve problems through data analysis. Data mining can be a very effective tool for companies dealing with sales and marketing. Financial institutions benefit from this tool using it to build risk models and detect fraud. However, there is a downside to data mining.

Recently it has been confirmed that a Russian Internet company utilized data mining tools to target Americans through Facebook with posts and ads during the 2016 election. The reason that they were able to do this is because Facebook has created a multi-billion dollar advertising business that allows marketers to select who they want to target based on criteria such as location, demographics, behavior, and interests. Facebook collects more data than you think. From general demographics like age and gender to more in-depth items like the ads that you click on and the type of phone you use, the amount of your personal information that is being targeted is alarming.

It was reported in September 2016 that Russian actors bought ads and created accounts on Facebook posing as activists groups. Their objective was to target specific demographics to create a division between voters and to discredit democracy. Ads and Facebook accounts were created not only to attack political candidates but also to promote stances on issues ranging from police brutality to border security.

Currently, Facebook has developed a tool that will show users if they liked or followed any accounts and content promoted by the Russian Internet company. Facebook has said that nearly 150 million people have potentially seen the content. The tool is set to be available at the end of the year.

This issue brings up questions about users’ privacy. Who exactly has access to our data? How secure is our information? Should Facebook allow that much access to users’ information? At times, targeted ads have been beneficial for me. For example, when I’ve done some online shopping and then something similar is suggested for me to check out. However, it is disconcerting to know that so much of my information is available to whoever wants to access it.

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