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The Internet's Original Sin

Ethan Zuckerman, 2014

In his article “The Internet’s Original Sin” Ethan Zuckerman explains that the world wide web as we know it is currently a “fiasco” and himself and other developers who helped build the web owe the general public an apology for how the web has turned out. The reason for this fiasco, Zuckerman claims, is that the funding model that let many start-up companies in the 90s survive, including Zuckerman’s, was advertising. Advertising as a business model was easy to implement and provided enough monetary return to keep companies afloat, so naturally this model became the most popular one.

Zuckerman himself is the creator of the popup ad, one of the most notorious advertising tools. Originally made to appease investors by creating some distance between the ad and the shown website it has since become a ubiquitous phenomenon, annoying users around the world. But annoyance isn’t the least of our worries when it comes to advertising on the web. As a result of advertising’s popularity and ubiquity on the web, Zuckerman explains that a myriad of problems arose and can be seen in our use of the web today. These problems are: the surveillance of internet users every move which creates ethical and privacy issues, pervasive clickbaity content instead of meaningful and thought-provoking content, the centralization of the web which leads to large corporations controlling speech which rivals the power of governments, and the personalization of content which creates dangerous polarization between people. Zuckerman acknowledges that while an ad supported web is open to people with low income and quickly grows the downsides out way the positive ones. Ultimately, Zuckerman claims that advertising “is the original sin of the web”.

References:

<https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2014/08/advertising-is-the-internets-original-sin/376041/>