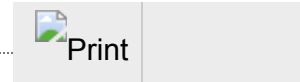





TODAY'S INTERNET NOT  
'SUSTAINABLE,' EXPERTS WARN

Google, Facebook 'dominate, privacy under assault, ad platform manipulated'



 google\_alphabet

Print

The digital world has been flooded with concerns in recent months over the power of the giant tech companies, particularly Google and Facebook, over the flow of information.

Conservatives in America have expressed alarm, and in Europe, a leader of the Brexit movement has accused Facebook of “doctoring” the news.

Now Congress has been told that the “digital ecosystem” that exists today is unworkable.

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“Two companies dominate the market. The privacy of internet users is under assault. The revenue model that sustained journalism

is broken. The ad platforms are manipulated by foreign adversaries. Secrecy and complexity are increasing as accountability is diminished,” said the Electronic Privacy Information Center in a statement delivered to members of Congress.

“It would be foolish to imagine that the current model is sustainable.”

The statement was delivered to members of the House Committee on Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Digital Commerce & Consumer Protection in connection with a hearing on the “ecosystem.”

The letter explained: “Today’s digital advertising techniques are very different from traditional advertising models. In the analog world, consumers could readily identify the placement of an ad, the source and its purpose. There was little need for advertisers to gather personal data from users. Perhaps most critically, advertising supported editorial content. Advertising made possible the publication of daily news. Traditional advertising sustained a healthy ecosystem that also made possible the production of news without government subsidy. Much of that has changed,” the letter said.

“There are many problems today with the Digital Advertising Ecosystems – profiling and tracking of internet users, increasing concentration of providers (Google and Facebook), the loss of support for editorial content, discriminatory practices and

redlining, preferencing the advertiser's products over competitor's, and political ads purchased by foreign advertisers intended [to] undermine democratic elections.

"It didn't have to be this way. More active regulation by the government could have sustained digital advertising models that were good advertisers and businesses, and good also for consumers, journalism, and democracy."

The letter explained an early system, called DoubleClick, protected consumers' privacy, but it later was acquired by Google, and the Federal Trade Commission approved the deal despite EPIC warnings about one company having "access to more information about the internet activities of consumers than any other company in the world."

"Much of what we predicted happened. Google broke many of the agreements to protect privacy that DoubleClick had established," the group's letter said.

The next "great damage" was done when Google moved from contextual advertising to behavioral advertising.

Contextual advertising simply shows products in newspapers or on the web. But behavioral advertising "targets the consumer directly. It relies on deep profiles. It provides no benefit to content providers, such as news organizations. In fact, the ... model attacks the revenue model that has sustained news organizations in the United States since the early days."

This system uses those algorithms that consider age, race, religion, nationality and other factors.

The letter says while advertising should provide consumers with information about products, Google and Facebook now “are providing advertisers information about consumers who have become the product.

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