



AAI Position on Facebook/Cambridge Analytica Revelations

Never in the history of advertising have two market players enjoyed such a share of the investment from brand owners.

Global digital ad spend will account for just shy of 40% of total ad spend in 2017. Google and Facebook represent almost half that amount (31.7% and 14.7% respectively) according to eMarketer. So nearly 20% of total brand marketers' budgets goes to these two platforms today.

They have become part of the media mainstay. And despite the recent fiasco surrounding Facebook, that's unlikely to change any time soon.

For all the talk of #deletefacebook and recent announcements that Mozilla, Commerzbank and some WFA members pulling their ads from the platform, it is highly unlikely that people – and brands – will leave Facebook in significant numbers in the short term.

That means they remain very much our partners, that our destinies remain intertwined, that their success can be brands' success too – but also that we have to work through our problems together.

The revelations in the last week that upwards of 50-60 million profiles of Facebook users had been harvested – that people's (and their friends) status updates, likes and in some cases private messages were unknowingly accessed – all with a view to potentially influencing an election – is nothing short of shocking.

The implications go far beyond our industry and touch upon the very fabric of society. It's symptomatic of an age where the digital ecosystem has got out of control.

The notion that personal data can be collected without people knowing or consenting is plain wrong. The good news is that we're coming to the end of that era with the arrival of the EU's General Data Protection Regulation – which will seek to give people control back of their online identities from May this year.

Since the GDPR impacts companies wherever they are in the world if they want to process the data of European citizens, this is effectively going to become a global standard for many global or regional brand owners.

In the coming weeks, the WFA will be launching a Data Transparency Manifesto with the support of major brand owners. The WFA will call on the whole industry to adopt a mind-set of “people first” rather than “data first” – a rallying cry to build a data ecosystem that properly respects consumer choices and their right to control their own data.

It is brand owners’ ad spend that ultimately power the whole online advertising ecosystem – and ultimately fund Facebook and Google’s profits. It is incumbent on us to hold these organisations to account. We will be respectfully calling on Facebook to be open with us and explain what has happened and what further revelations we can expect.

Brands will need to play a major role in rebuilding a digital ecosystem where people decide who they share their data with, when and how. No doubt this will lead to major upheavals in the industry but ultimately that’s the only sustainable solution.

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