

Australian Ad Observatory**QUT Ethics Approval Number 2021004555****Research team**

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Monash University**ARC Centre of Excellence for Automated Decision-Making and
Society****Why is the study being conducted?**

The use of custom targeted advertising, known as 'dark ads' poses a host of potential social harms, from the re-introduction of historical forms of discriminating, to the propagation of racist or gender stereotyping, and the spread of false and harmful information. Beyond these potential harms, we know very little about how advertising is targeted to users on social platforms like Facebook, largely due to a lack of independent data as to the scope and kinds of advertising activity conducted on the platform. The Australian Ad Observatory project brings together researchers from Australian universities within the ADM+S Centre to develop strategies for addressing the potential harms posed by 'dark ads' and provide some accountability and transparency mechanisms for targeted advertising. The project uses a 'data donation' approach that involves you and other members of the general public in Australia in

the research. Participation involves you donating advertising that is visible in your Facebook newsfeed into a public dataset of targeted advertising materials managed by our research team. The dataset will be used by our team, and in the spirit of our data donation philosophy also shared as a public dataset for the purpose of enabling additional research into the nature of online targeted advertising. As a public dataset the data may be accessed and used by third-parties for any number of purposes, however as no personal identifying information will be collected meaning the risks of misuse or harm arising from such misuse are negligible. We invite you to participate if you are currently residing in Australia, are a user of Facebook, and are aged 18 or older.

What does participation involve?

As part of the installation process, we will ask you to provide some general demographic information (including age, gender, overall location, etc.). None of this information can be used to personally identify you; it will be used only to examine general demographic patterns in the data we gather.

Once you have installed the browser plugin it will identify sponsored advertising content that you encounter while using Facebook. The plugin will take a snapshot of this advertising content and send it back to a central server, allowing us to build an independent archive of advertising materials that are shown to Facebook users. Any impact on your own use of your computer and Facebook will be minimal, the plugin cannot access any of your Facebook data, nor capture any non-advertising content such as status updates from friends.

Your participation in this research project is entirely voluntary. If you do agree to participate you can withdraw from the research project without comment or penalty. To withdraw, simply disable or uninstall the plugin from your browser. Once you do so, no new data will be gathered, but we will retain the data you have already provided as we cannot trace this back to you. Your decision to participate or not participate will in no way impact upon your current or future relationship with QUT.

What are the possible benefits for me if I take part?

It is expected that this research project will not benefit you directly. The outcomes of the research, however, will benefit our understanding of platform-based advertising and enable independent research into the role that this algorithmically targeted advertising plays in society.

Outcomes from this research will be published from time to time on the project's page at <https://www.admscentre.org.au/adobservatory/>.

What are the possible risks for me if I take part?

There are minimal risks associated with your participation in this research project. These include:

1. Inconvenience of having to install the plugin.
2. Inconvenience of day-to-day plugin background operations.
3. Technical issues during installation or operation of the browser plugin.
4. Revelation of personally identifiable user information.

We have addressed the first three of these by making it as easy as possible to install the browser plugin, testing it thoroughly, and minimising its impact on your day-to-day computer use. Also, if you run into any trouble with the plugin, please simply disable or uninstall it again.

To prevent any disclosure of personal information, we ask only for some generic demographic

information, and store this only against a computer-generated ID that cannot be traced back to you. We do not capture and store any identifiable information about you, your computer system, your network connection, or anything else that could conceivably be linked back to you.

What about privacy and confidentiality?

All information reported by the browser plugin is stored only against a computer-generated ID that cannot be traced back to you: it will not be possible to identify you at any stage of the research, because personally identifying information is not sought in any of the demographic questions we are asking in relation to these forms of advertising.

The plugin provides you with a full list of ads and ad information that have been identified and shared with our research team.

Any data collected as part of this research project will be stored securely as per QUT's Management of research data policy. Data will be stored for a minimum of 5 years, and can be disclosed if it is to protect you or others from harm, if specifically required by law, or if a regulatory or monitoring body such as the ethics committee requests it.

The research project is funded by the ARC Centre of Excellence for Automated Decision-Making and Society, and, in addition to the QUT research team, partner researchers in the Centre from other institutions (listed above) will also have access to the data obtained during the project.

In keeping with our 'data donation' philosophy, the full dataset will also be shared via a public data repository at the end of the project that is accessible to anybody, including people not involved in this research project. To remove any residual risk of re-identification of participants, however small, we will create a new set of computer-generated participant ID codes for this public dataset.

How do I give my consent to participate?

The installation process includes an online form that enables you to give your consent to participate in this research. If you do not wish to provide your consent, the browser plugin installation process will be aborted, and the plugin will not be activated.

What if I have questions about the research project?

If you have any questions or require further information please contact one of the listed researchers:

Prof. Daniel Angus	daniel.angus@qut.edu.au	07 3138 8160
Abdul Obeid	abdul.obei@qut.edu.au	07 3138 9089

What if I have a concern or complaint regarding the conduct of the research project?

QUT is committed to research integrity and the ethical conduct of research projects. If you wish to discuss the study with someone not directly involved, particularly in relation to matters concerning policies, information or complaints about the conduct of the study or your rights as a participant, you may contact the QUT Research Ethics Advisory Team on 07 3138 5123 or email humanethics@qut.edu.au.

Thank you for helping with this research project. Please print out this page for your information.