

SOCIAL MOVEMENTS, DIGITAL FUNDRAISING & ISSUE AWARENESS: THE ROLE OF TARGETED ADS



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Introduction

Digital advertising plays a crucial role in providing valuable services and content to consumers, while free online tools and increased accessibility has created innovative ways for young people to collectively mobilise. Digital tool innovation has also brought about fundamental changes in the way social movements and grassroots organisations seek to enact change, with the targeted advertising ecosystem playing a key role in fundraising and outreach. While many see the benefits, wider concerns exist on privacy and the misuse of data. Amid EU policy discussions on the future of Europe's digital economy, and companies transitioning to privacy-compliant alternatives - how have individuals, groups, and organisations used digital tools and targeted ads for collective identity building and issue awareness? And what do young people think about the trade-offs between personalisation and privacy?

Technology & the Digital Advertising Ecosystem

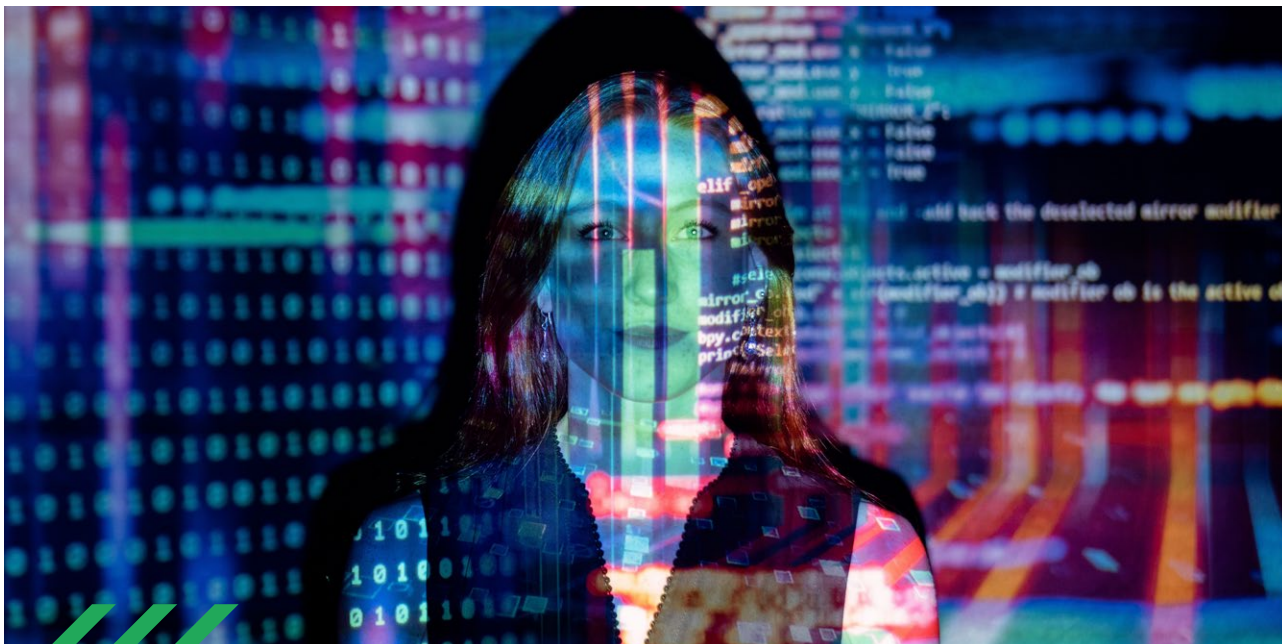
The Internet and technological innovation have dramatically expanded the toolkit available to marketers, campaigners, issue awareness advocates and young people alike. This has opened up whole new modes of outreach to potential consumers, groups, and like-minded individuals. The online advertising ecosystem is as a result one of the most successful markets, operated over with billions of smart devices.¹ Digital data is the key transformative development, with users sharing personal data online resulting in unprecedented levels of insight into individual consumers.² Representing the key economic difference between online and offline advertising, the ability to more precisely target ads to specific consumers or donors based on their characteristics and demographics has been met with both enthusiasm and scepticism. This is based on the collection of consumer data and tracking activities to target ads to the right people.³



¹ Ullah, I. et.al (2020). Privacy in targeted advertising: A survey. IEEE Communications Surveys & Tutorials.

² John, K. L et.al. (2018). Ads That Don't Overstep. How to make sure you don't take personalisation too far. Harvard Business Review.

³ Lau, Y. (2020). A Brief Primer on the Economics of Targeted Advertising. Economic Issues. Bureau of Economics, Federal Trade Commission. January 2020.



Targeted Ads and the Original Ad-Supported Business Model

The rise of big data and artificial intelligence has meant that firms can collect and process an unprecedented amount of consumer-level data. This granular data means they can identify who is more likely to need or want certain products or services, based on their purchase history, and personal data (IP addresses, browser habits, behavioural patterns). Advertisers on Facebook for example can use age, gender, and location, and social activities including posts, likes, and shares to reach their desired audience.⁴ The value and impact of this has grown significantly, with response rates improving, click-through and conversion rates increasing, and customer engagement on the rise.⁵ The same can be seen with the response rates to targeted advertising in the charity and third sectors, and engagement with fundraising campaigns.

Platforms Funded by Digital Advertising

Online platforms attract customers by offering their core services for free. They then make money from business users on another side of the platform (e.g., the commission charged to retailers or app developers). For other platforms like search engines and social media, monetisation comes from selling inventory to advertisers (e.g., empty space on a web page or mobile app that can be filled with text, links, images, and videos).⁶

Personal Data in Exchange for Free Access

The targeted ad-supported business model means people can monetise their personal data in exchange for digital goods and services – financed by revenues from targeted ads.⁷ Having purchased advertised goods from firms the consumer is in part paying for the website's “free” digital goods and services through personal data. Targeted advertising as a result benefits all parties, from the consumer and user to mobile app developers, advertising networks, and firms.

⁴ Shin, J and Yu, J. (2019). Targeted Advertising: How Do Consumers Make Inferences? March 5, 2019.

⁵ Summers et.al (2016). An audience of one: Behaviorally targeted ads as implied social labels. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 43(1): 156-178.

⁶ CMA. (2020). Online platforms and digital advertising. Market study final report. 1 July 2020. Competition & Markets Authority.

⁷ Lau, Y. (2020).



A Shifting Ecosystem: 'Privacy Sandbox' & Cookie-Free Consumerism

Companies are currently in the process of developing alternatives to the original targeted advertising model, with Google announcing the removal of third-party cookies from Chrome, and Apple's announcement that iOS14 users would have to opt-in to the identifier for advertising (IDFA).⁸ This represents a significant shift in the status quo for online advertising, with privacy considerations becoming the focal point instead of the afterthought. Through the 'Privacy Sandbox' initiative it is hoped people's privacy online will be protected - while companies and developers will still be able to build thriving businesses to ensure that online tools are open and accessible to all.⁹ Personalisation will still be possible through solutions including first-party data, and location and time-based messaging, while consumers will have more control over the data they share

with companies online, and the level of personalisation they want through explicit consent.¹⁰ This will open the door to targeted ads based on clustering users into groups with similar interests, rather than targeting individuals based on third parties tracking behaviours online.

⁸ Criteo. (2021). Contextual Targeting in 2021: Everything You Need to Know Before Cookies Disappear. April 20, 2021.

⁹ Cameron. N. (2021). Industry views mixed as Google extends third-party cookie deadline. CMO. 25 June 2021.

¹⁰ Deloitte. (2020). How the cookie crumbles: Marketing in a cookie-less world. Deloitte LLP.



NGO & Third Sector Campaigns: Targeted Ads in Action

The charity industry has just as much need to advertise as any other – looking to spread their message, voice, or issue, and gather as much support as possible. Personalisation and targeted advertisements have become a key part of digital fundraising, representing a powerful tool for many charities and issue awareness movements. Personalised charity communications have a drastic impact on fundraising, with it being seen that 44% of donors and interested individuals being willing to contribute up to 10% more for a personalised experience. This

number increases to 62% for donors from the Millennial generation.¹¹ Successful examples include the British Heart Foundation who experimented with innovative ideas with the help of personalised campaign videos for fundraisers on JustGiving, to smaller charities utilising personalised stories on Instagram including the Woodgreen animal charity.¹² Both examples brought about positive results, the former seeing a 14% increase in donations, and the latter seeing significant outreach improvements. Both showcase the power of data when leveraged in the right way. Below are some further examples of how charity advertising has meant organisations have been able to amplify their message, reach their audience, and enact positive issue-based change.

¹¹ CHARITYDIGITAL. (2019). Why personalisation is the key to successful digital fundraising. 25 July 2019.

¹² CHARITYDIGITAL. (2019).



Organisation: Crisis (UK) Campaign: “Crisis at Christmas”¹³

The national charity for homeless people in the UK, Crisis provides help and assistance in lifting people out of homelessness through education, employment, housing, and well-being centres. The ‘Crisis at Christmas’ campaign has been running since 1972 - providing meals, shelter, and support to homeless people during the holiday season.

The Issue

Despite the success of the campaign, Crisis needed to compete in an increasingly crowded fundraising period. The charity wanted to reach more ambitious targets and develop a testing model to evaluate their outreach and impact.

The Solution

With the help of Catalyst and Uprise Up, they built in-depth supporter profiles from existing data, analysed audience touchpoints across different channels, and used machine learning to improve audience targeting. Remarketing was then used to reinforce the campaign message.

The Outcome

The results were drastic. Crisis gained the highest number of online donations for their Christmas campaign to date, reduced the outreach cost per donation, and increased revenue. This was even while allocating 20% of the total spend on testing, finding new opportunities, and improving on previous campaigns. They saw a 24% decrease in Cost Per Action (CPA), a 158% increase in revenue, and a 169% increase in profit. The huge success of the initiative meant the campaign won awards in two separate categories at The Drum Digital Advertising Awards Europe 2020 (Not for Profit and Most Effective Use of Data).



24%
DECREASE IN COST PER ACTION

158%
INCREASE IN REVENUE

169%
INCREASE IN PROFIT

Crisis

¹³ Lawrence. A. (2021). Crisis Paid Social & Programmatic. Crisis 2019. Uprise Up; Lambiase. S. (2020). The Drum Awards Winners 2020. 14th May 2020.

Organisation: Save the Children (Germany)

Campaign: “Save the Wishes”¹⁴

Save the Children is a UK founded charity improving the lives of children through education, health-care, emergency and disaster relief, advocacy, and humanitarian development. It established itself in Germany in 2004.

The Issue

The German arm of the charity was looking to raise its brand awareness, improve its outreach across the country, and boost donations during the Christmas season.

The Solution

Working with Facebook Creative Shop, Sinnema animation studio and Spectrm, the charity shared real-life stories of children in difficult situations. They used a two-prong approach to boost donations while also encouraging meaningful dialogue on their work with children. The first part involved the creation of video ads, where three children shared their wishes for Christmas. An animated call to action button allowed viewers to donate towards making the wishes come true. The second part kept the dialogue running by linking a video add to Messenger. This led to a Messenger experience which included different interactive experiences.

The Outcome

The campaign helped boost both the number of donations, but also awareness levels on the work of the charity. Overall, 41,000 new people were made aware of the campaign, 57,000 stated they were likely to donate, and a 29% increase in donations was seen. According to the Online Fundraising Manager, Florian Ertel, the campaign ‘gave a voice to those who are often not enough heard: the children of this world’.



¹⁴ Facebook. (2020). Save the Children Germany. Raising awareness and sales with a business experience on messenger. Case Study.



Organisation: The Red Cross (Sweden) Campaign: Harnessing the Power of Emotional Data¹⁵

The Swedish Red Cross is a humanitarian aid organisation, which is part of the International Red Cross and the Red Crescent Movement.

The Issue

The Swedish Red Cross wanted to boost awareness among donors, boost support for humanitarian causes, and as a result see a growth in fundraising and donations.

The Solution

Partnering with Unruly, the charity produced three videos evoking emotions of sadness, pride, and warm-heartedness to harness the power of emotional data. An audience of urbanites over the age of 25 were chosen, while targeting tools were used to test the videos and uncover the most engaged audience. The ad was then targeted to this 'bullseye audience', with customisation, sharing buttons, and bespoke brand bars.

The Outcome

The campaign saw over 270,000 complete video views, while the custom audience targeting (building the audience with the most emotional response to the video) achieved an extra 90,000 completed views. According to the Red Cross the campaign not only saw increased donations but generated 'insights which will help to inform our future communication strategy'.



¹⁵ Woodford. N. (2018). Case Study: Growing support for the Red Cross. Unruly. 2018.11.27.

Organisation: Barnardo's (UK) Campaign: "Coronavirus Crisis Appeal"¹⁶

Set up to help disadvantaged children in 1867, Barnardo's provides hundreds of thousands of children, young people, parents, and carers with care assistance, mental health advice, fostering and adoption, and wider youth related services.

The Issue

Children and families across the UK were increasingly in, or on the brink of poverty as a direct result of the Covid-19 pandemic. At the same time providing vulnerable families with the food, utilities, and mental health and well-being services became even more challenging based on a loss in income, retail shop closures, and the suspension of fundraising activities. A new strategy was needed.

The Solution

Barnardo's learnt to test new audiences, formats, and messaging, and used a data-driven approach to benchmark their tactics compared to previous campaigns. A focus on audience segmentation meant the charity could build audiences, capture their motivations, and tailor their approach to campaign messages accordingly.

The Outcome

The charity almost trebled its digital income target of £92,000 (raising over £250,000), connected with over 7 million people, and secured more than 6,000 new supporters. They were also able to provide 4,760 mental health and wellbeing packs, thousands of food packages, and technology donations to families in need.

The huge success of the campaign meant Barnardo's were awarded best online fundraising campaign at the Third Sector Digital Awards 2020.



¹⁶ Third Sector. (2020). Third Sector Digital Awards – Best online fundraising campaign: Barnardo's for Barnardo's Coronavirus Crisis Appeal. 29, July 2020.



Re-Targeting to Leverage ‘Personas’

Knowing your audience and being able to utilise the available data can play a huge role in the success of fundraising efforts. By having information from websites, social media profiles, and demographics – charities and non-profits can build a ‘marketing persona’ to streamline their efforts and ensure the right messages hit the right people.¹⁷ This is further linked with re-targeting, whereby once an audience and following has been engaged, they can be re-targeted based on their preferences, previous engagement levels, and likelihood and willingness to engage further in the future.¹⁸

Collective Behaviour and Social Movements (CBSM) Online

Every social movement is in one way or another shaped by the technology available at the time. Activists have utilised the latest communication devices to recruit, share and distribute information and to mobilise support, ranging from the printing press, radio or television – to modern day examples of cloud-technologies, high-speed digital tools and the internet.¹⁹ The rapid development of digital technology has had a significant impact on modern collective action, with a growing use of and reliance on microblogging applications like Twitter, social networking apps including Facebook, and video-sharing apps like YouTube – to name just a few.²⁰

These developments have been transformative, with digital media technologies having an emancipatory effect on individuals and groups. This is because when compared to more traditional media, digital media technologies have removed many of the constraints present on authorship, influence, and shared emotion.²¹ This has created an enabling environment for social movements – boosting access to networks and spaces, and facilitating collective action and identity.²² Digital technology has also contributed to new forms of organising, including through the ability of individuals to organically take on interdependent roles, the presence of wider avenues for socialising, solidarity, and empowerment, and cross platform or application collective action.²³

Moreover, social movements online enable a decentralised, leaderless, and diverse politic. This allows individuals and groups who can feel invisible in daily life or through mainstream forms of engagement to articulate their needs and experiences, and to engage with and build an online community with similar and likeminded people.²⁴ This has given rise to new forms and expressions of both individual autonomy and collective freedom, leading to internet and technology enabled movements and social action.²⁵ This ‘personalisation’ of the internet and digital tools alongside the multiplicity of communications networks (online and offline, organisational and crowd-sourced) – define modern social movements as we know them today, and will continue to define them looking to the future.

¹⁷ Ibid., (2019).

¹⁸ Byrne, C. (2019). Social Media Advertising for Charities and Not For Profits. 13th June, 2019. Impression.

¹⁹ Carty, V et.al. (2019). Social Movements and New Technology: The Dynamics of Cyber Activism in the Digital Age. Palgrave Macmillan.

²⁰ Young, A et.al. (2019). Digital Organising for Social Impact: Current Insights and future Avenues on Collective Action, Social Movements, and Digital Technologies. Information and Organisation.

²¹ Young, A et.al. (2019).

²² Cloud, L. D. (2020). Progressive Social Movements and the Internet. The Oxford Encyclopaedia of Communication and Critical Cultural Studies. Oxford University Press.

²³ Young, A et.al. (2019).

²⁴ Cloud, L. D. (2020).

²⁵ Funke, P.N and Wolfson, T. (2017). From global justice to Occupy and Podemos: Mapping three stages of contemporary activism. *TripleC: Communication, Capitalism, and critique: Open Access Journal for a Global Sustainable Information Society*, 15(2), 393–403.



Towards a Collective Identity Online

The continuing emergence of new ICTs and communications platforms have meant that new ways of thinking about activism and collective agency have been needed. This is based on the ability of individuals and activists to use virtual environments to facilitate collective identities. Micro-mobilising across time and space, people can remove barriers through online platforms, demonstrate their commitment to a collective identity, and share symbols and ideas while never having met or mobilised in person.²⁶ This is further enhanced by the low cost of mobilisation facilitated by virtual environments. Social media plays a key role here, especially for younger generations – shifting the goal posts on modern day mobilisation and movement building.

The impact of this can be significant, especially for campaigning and issue awareness movements. Low costs, copresence, and people with good digital skills when combined can result in more people being mobilised or to sign a petition, the ability to plan actions freely, and perhaps most importantly to reach previously unreachable groups and audiences.²⁷

Crowdsourcing and Peer Production

Encompassing the modern-day form of youth activism, the sharing of media content and ability to work together to solve problems and create something new means that youth can assert power. They can also frame issues and topics in a way that compels others to change their minds or support a cause, and to coordinate and amplify further efforts.²⁸ This can result in significant spill-over effects, youth ownership of causes and movements, and peer-to-peer growth.

²⁶ Ilten, C and McInerney, B.P. (2019). *Social Movements and Digital Technology: A Research Agenda*. Princeton University Press.

²⁷ Ilten, C and McInerney, B.P. (2019).

²⁸ Graeff, E. (2016). *Youth Digital Activism in United Nations*. (2016). *Youth Civic Engagement*. World Youth Report. United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. United Nations Publication.



Social Movements & Digital Activism in Practice

As highlighted above, activists are making the most of the increased accessibility provided by technology to drive change. This has led to record numbers of people from all walks of life taking part in activism. These mass mobilisations have been aimed at issues ranging from climate change and racial justice - to gun control and gender-based violence. Moreover, at the core of these rising movements is youth agency, alongside the increased accessibility fostered by technologies allowing youth to collectively mobilise through easy to use, versatile, and cheap communication tools.²⁹ The rise of digital memes, real-time reporting, or live streaming of demonstrations, and even hashtags to connect with groups across the globe has resulted in digitally created movements now being a common feature of our cultural landscape. Social media, online fundraising, and digital mobilisation are therefore providing people with omnichannel activism journeys, and a real and tangible way to have their voices heard and enact the social change wanted.³⁰ Moreover, once engaged – these new modes of activism can foster the beginning of people's issue awareness journeys, and open doors for continued engagement, outreach, and wider mobilisation. A further widespread development is the accessibility of data visualisation. Creative activists can 'make the invisible, visible', opening up vast amounts of information on varying issues to people who may not have known about it beforehand. Examples include interactive maps to showcase different aspects of climate change (sea levels, heat index, drought risk, etc.) to make the issue easier to visualise for a wider audience.³¹

Cloud Technology and the New Age of Social Movements

The effective use of cloud services adds a further avenue of opportunity for activists. Quick and easy access to centralised data and communication tools

like hashtags and online petitions, and real-time directions and information – means social movements can act and react at will.³² This is key in maintaining a narrative and forging a collective identity. The benefits of cloud tools are well known in the business world (e.g., remote work, secure data, lower running costs, data sharing, etc.), which demonstrates their potential for social movements. Moreover, some of the specific tools that have been highlighted as transformative are Interactive Voice Response (IVR), voice broadcasting, and SMS alerts.³³

The Youth Preference Online: Personalisation, Control & Trust?

For the younger generations, the shift towards a more predictive digital experience is now the norm, with consumers viewing predictive technology and heightened personalisation as the future. Gen Z in particular lead the way in expecting a personalised experience, with 32% stating they would stop visiting a site if it didn't anticipate what they like or wanted, and youth in general being more willing to share data in return for services and products.³⁴ People see the benefits of targeted ads, with consumers naming benefits ranging from finding promotional sales and new brands, to local businesses, product recommendation and a more efficient online shopping experience.

While the younger generations hold more positive views, this is not always reciprocated by older people – with almost two thirds of consumers in the US holding negative views on the personalisation in general. Moreover, the repercussions of data breaches have seen privacy backlashes, and a growing awareness among consumers of all ages of the importance of their data. This has seen a rise the number of consumers saying they would stay away from companies that had suffered data breaches.³⁵

²⁹ Bloch, N. (2019). How technology is shaping creative activism in the 21st century. Waging Nonviolence. March 20, 2019.

³⁰ Frankfurt, T. (2020). How Technology Is Fuelling Social Justice During A Pandemic. Forbes Technology Council. Forbes.

³¹ Bloch, N. (2019).

³² Beniwal, K. (2021). Rainbows and Clouds: How Cloud Services Can Help Promote the LGBTQ+ Movement. Acefone.

³³ Beniwal, K. (2021).

³⁴ Bobby Duffy et.al. (2018). BEYOND BINARY: The lives and choices of Generation Z. Ipsos Thinks. Ipsos Mori.

³⁵ Jacobson, T. (2020). The Privacy Pendulum: How Millennial And Gen Z Perceptions Of Search And Privacy Are Changing. May, 18, 2020.



Personalisation with Control

While young consumers enjoy the personalised experience targeted advertising brings to their on-line experience, trust and control are still seen as key factors. When young people are more aware of how their data is being used and have control over its flow – trust levels increase. This has a positive impact on click-through rates, engagement, and willingness to further take advantage of the personalised experience. Tests have reinforced this, with non-profits who advertised on social media with privacy features made explicit while giving users more control over their personal information - seeing their ads almost double in effectiveness. As a result, when consumers are given more say over the information they consciously share, transparency boosts performance.³⁶ Therefore a fine line seems to exist between trust, control and the pleasures of a personalised experience, and what some see as an overbearing personalisation at the expense of privacy and control.

The Policy Dimension: Striking the Right Balance

The growth of targeted ads has been met with some scepticism, as detailed previously. Targeted advertising and recommender systems are a key current policy debate, with concerns being raised by a number of people including the European Data Protection Supervisor (EDPS). In the context of the EU Commission's Digital Services package, the need for minimum standards for the largest tech firms in relation to the collection and transfer of data was highlighted as fundamental.³⁷ This focuses in particular on removing profiling by default to ensure compliance with regional data protection rules, the promotion of transparency and user control, and the removal of profiling for content moderation unless strictly necessary. Critics also argue for a policy to further complement the rights and freedoms guaranteed in the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).³⁸

³⁶ John. K. L et.al (2018).

³⁷ Cunningham, F. (2021). European Data Protection Supervisor raises concerns around targeted advertising. 03-2021.

³⁸ Lomas. N. (2021). EU's top privacy regulator urges ban on surveillance-based ad targeting. Techcrunch, February 10, 2021.



Another key point being discussed is how to ensure competitive digital markets and a larger choice of platforms and services. With the view that competition, consumer protection, and data protection law are three inextricably linked policy areas – European technical standards on interoperability are argued as necessary to reinforce contestability and to create opportunities for services to offer better data protection.³⁹

The discussion is heating up, with Members of the European Parliament and the European Commission putting forward contrasting views on the role and scope of targeted ads. In a recent hearing, Margrethe Vestager, the European Commissioner for Competition reiterated the benefit they have for smaller businesses in their search for potential customers. While some policymakers want to see targeted ads removed completely, the Commission wants to keep them while ensuring greater transparency from companies on how they targeted users.

Ensuring the Right Trade-Offs for Youth

Looking to the future, it is argued that if policies restrict websites from collecting consumer personal data, consumers lose the ability to monetise their data. This in turn has a knock-on effect whereby consumers either have to pay more (income effect) or search for and watch more untargeted ads (time effect). It is also argued that a lack of monetisation could have a disproportionately negative impact on both wealth-constrained consumers who would lose out on free services, and smaller brands and organisations as result of the consumer and economic value the targeted ad-supported model currently brings.⁴⁰

Along similar lines, a substantial move away from advertiser funding and the internet's commercial model would arguably hit smaller sites and services. This is based over 50% of internet users in Europe stating music streaming and email are the only ad-funded sites they would be willing to pay for, and less than half likely to pay for more than three subscriptions in total.⁴¹ The same sample of Europeans (75%) stated they would choose today's experience online over one without targeted ads.

With the benefits of the targeted ad enabled internet alongside its impact on mobilisation, charity fundraising, and social movements coming up against growing political and consumer concerns on data breaches, privacy, competition, and the potential challenges this brings – how can the regulatory environment strike a balance? The policy and regulatory frameworks will need to consider the wider impact of interventions, and work towards an environment that makes the most of the benefits of targeted ads and personalisation but avoids the potential risks for the consumer. Moreover, with a large number of consumers wanting trust, transparency, and an understanding of what is being done with their data – a balance will need to be found to ensure ads that do not overstep.

³⁹ Cunningham, F. (2021).

⁴⁰ Lau, Y. (2020).

⁴¹ IAB Europe. (2020). What would an internet without targeted ads look like? IAB Europe.

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