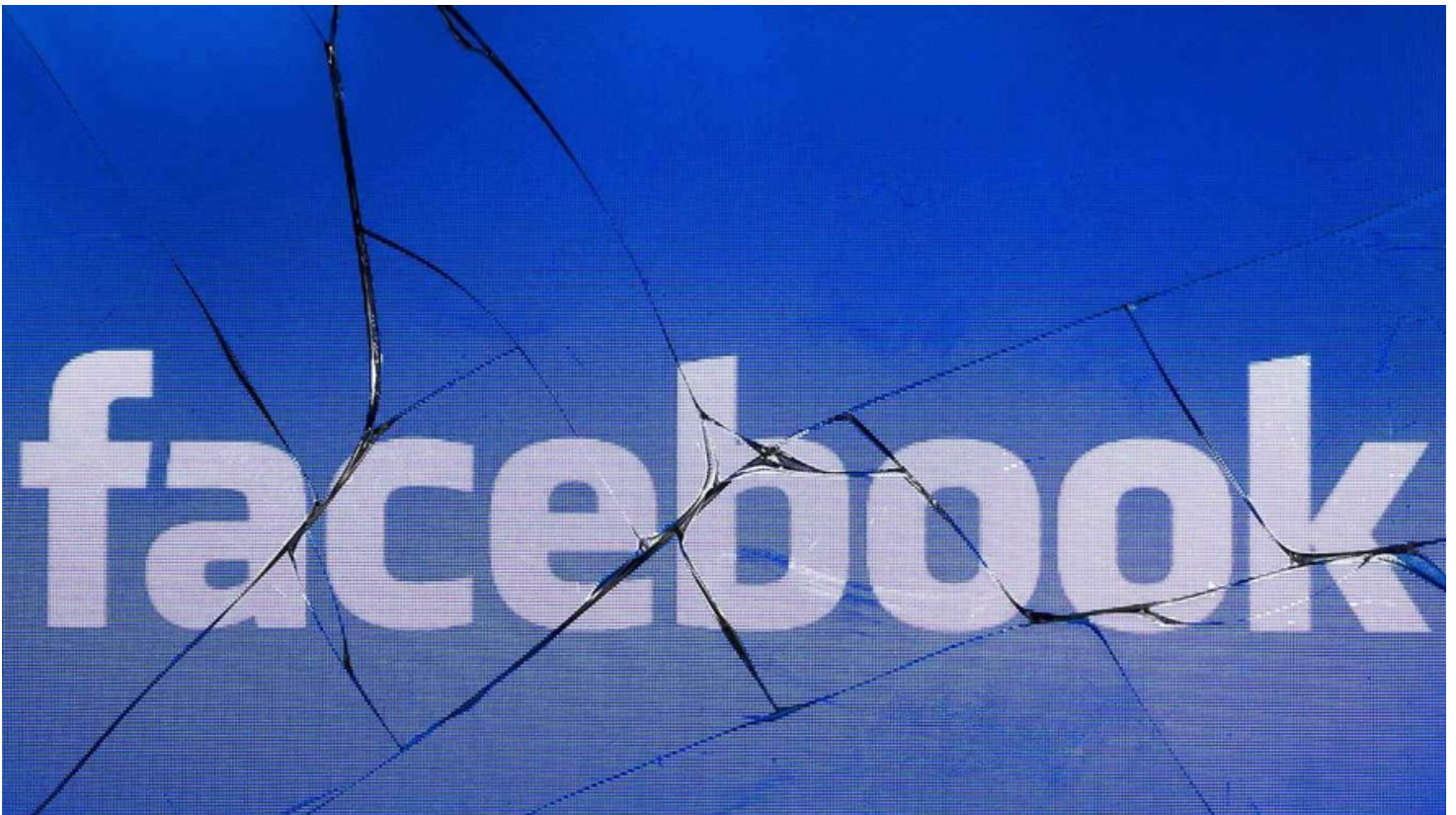


Facebook could be in big trouble for some of its housing ads

By Adam Gabbatt, The Guardian, adapted by Newsela staff on 04.05.19

Word Count **414**

Level **590L**



The U.S. government says Facebook is breaking the law by restricting who can view housing-related ads based on their "race, color, national origin, religion." Photo: Joel Saget/AFP/Getty Images

The U.S. government says Facebook broke a law. The law is called the Fair Housing Act. It is meant to protect citizens. It fights discrimination when buying or renting a home.

HUD stands for the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. It is part of the government. Its job is to make sure everyone has a fair place to live.

Ads Make The Company A Lot Of Money

Facebook uses what is called targeted advertising. Companies pay to show ads on its site. Facebook lets companies choose who sees the ads. This allowed companies to discriminate against certain people. HUD said Facebook blocked who could see housing ads. These ads could be showing homes to buy or rent.

Facebook gathers information about its users. HUD says Facebook then uses this information. They decide which users see housing ads.

The company makes most of its money from selling ads. Facebook earns more than \$50 billion a year.

Technology Is Not Always Used For Good

The ad technology can be very useful. Companies and groups can decide on a message for an ad. They can show it to the exact group they want.

Facebook said it was surprised by the ads. It said it had been working with HUD. The company wants to address the concerns.

Last month, Facebook said it would make changes. It hopes to stop discrimination in housing ads. Other kinds of ads can have this problem. They include job listings.

HUD said Facebook lets advertisers exclude people in other ways. One is based on where people live. Some ads can only be seen by men or only by women.

Additionally, HUD says that Facebook allowed advertisers to exclude parents. Anyone born in another country could be blocked. Non-Christians could be blocked, too. Those interested in Hispanic culture could also be left out. These were just a few examples.

Keeping A Watchful Eye

Ben Carson leads HUD. He said Facebook's actions limit peoples' housing choices. It is like "slamming a door in someone's face," Carson said.

Facebook might have to pay fines. It could cost them millions of dollars.

The website is being watched more closely. Some people see this government decision as proof that unfair things were done. Lawmakers are making sure the company follows the rules. Activist groups are also making sure Facebook follows the rules.

The United States and Europe are already looking more closely at the company. They are examining how it uses its data.

Quiz

- 1 Read the section "Technology Is Not Always Used For Good."
Select the paragraph that explains how Facebook discriminated against people.
- (A) The ad technology can be very useful. Companies and groups can decide on a message for an ad. They can show it to the exact group they want.
 - (B) Facebook said it was surprised by the ads. It said it had been working with HUD. The company wants to address the concerns.
 - (C) Last month, Facebook said it would make changes. It hopes to stop discrimination in housing ads. Other kinds of ads can have this problem. They include job listings.
 - (D) Additionally, HUD says that Facebook allowed advertisers to exclude parents. Anyone born in another country could be blocked. Non-Christians could be blocked, too. Those interested in Hispanic culture could also be left out. These were just a few examples.
- 2 Which question is answered in the section "Ads Make The Company A Lot Of Money"?
- (A) Why does Facebook discriminate?
 - (B) How do Facebook ads work?
 - (C) Why is discrimination a bad thing?
 - (D) How much does an ad cost?
- 3 How did Facebook change because it was accused of breaking the law?
- (A) Facebook says it has been working with HUD to address concerns.
 - (B) Facebook will not be allowed to post new ads.
 - (C) Facebook says it will show the same ads to everyone.
 - (D) Facebook will not change because of this issue.
- 4 Read the section "Technology Is Not Always Used For Good."
According to the section, why did companies not want everyone to see their ads?
- (A) because they wanted to make the most money possible
 - (B) because they did not have enough houses for everyone
 - (C) because they wanted only some types of people to see the ads
 - (D) because they made a mistake when they created the ads