Online Behavioral Advertising User Studies

Pedro Giovanni Leon and Blase Ur
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OBA User Studies

Smart, Useful, Scary, Creepy: Perceptions of Behavioral Advertising


What Do Online Behavioral Advertising Privacy Disclosures Communicate to Users?
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What Do Online Behavioral Advertising Privacy Disclosures Communicate to Users?
Study Overview

- 48 interviews
  - Non-technical users
- Perceptions of advertising
- Understanding of OBA
- Balancing pros and cons
Limited Knowledge about OBA

Tracking

☑️ Tell websites I do not want to be tracked
Limited Knowledge about OBA

- Don’t know how it works
  - Based on searches, Facebook, Amazon
- Don’t know who is involved
  - Haven’t heard of most companies
  - Don’t associate major companies with ads
Limited Knowledge about OBA

- Unaware of privacy mechanisms
  - Deleting cookies can limit OBA
  - Unfamiliar with opt-outs or DNT
- Expected options in web browser & antivirus
Smart & Useful... but Scary & Creepy

- More relevant ads vs. privacy concerns
- OBA surreptitious
- Lack of knowledge led them to think the worst
- Complex preferences
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OBA Control Mechanisms
Problematic opt-out interface
Performance Options

- Scan and block images served off the matched tracker domain
- Scan and block iframes served off the matched tracker domain
- Scan and block embed and object tags served off the matched tracker domain
- Look for and prevent redirection from known trackers
- Scan for dynamically inserted page elements

Blocking Options

- [ ] Enable web bug blocking
- [ ] Enable cookie protection [experimental]

659 bugs & 396 cookies (click for more info)

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Common Usability Problems

- Inappropriate defaults
- Poorly designed interfaces, jargon
- Lack of feedback
- Misconceptions
- Some tools break functionality
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What Do Online Behavioral Advertising Privacy Disclosures Communicate to Users?
Do OBA disclosures empower users to make privacy choices?

• Online study of 1,505 participants
OBA Disclosures in Context
OBA Disclosures in Isolation
Two Icons and Seven Taglines

- “AdChoices”
- “Interest based ads”
- “Why did I get this ad?”

- “Learn about your ad choices”
- “Configure ad preferences”

- “Sponsor ads”
- Blank (no tagline)
Findings (1/2)

- OBA disclosures are not noticed
- Purpose was misunderstood
  - “AdChoices” was outperformed
- Users are afraid to click
Findings (2/2)

- Opt out = “Stop advertising companies from collecting information about your browsing activities.” (FALSE)
- 63% thought it was true
Recommendations

- Understand what users care about
- Understand how users make decisions
- Iterative user study process
- Match expectations
- Educate users
Work in Progress

- Understanding what matters for users
- The impact of information on behavior
- Field study of privacy tools
References

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Pedro Leon: pgl@andrew.cmu.edu

Blase Ur: bur@cmu.edu