Case Study 7

Gender bias in ads on prominent social media site.

Theme of the Case Study:
• Social Media
• Bias

Abstract (Summary):
Global Witness initiated some paid ads across Facebook in the following countries: UK, the Netherlands, France, India, Ireland, and South Africa. The ads focused on real job vacancies from various fields including pilots, hairdressers and psychologists. The results of who the ads were targeted at through the social media sites algorithm showed a clear gender bias relating to the job vacancy with 91% of individuals being shown the advert for the mechanic vacancy being male and 79% of individuals shown an advert for a pre-school teacher being female.

Upon further research in The Netherlands and France in collaboration with a feminist organisation, it was shown that 97% of individuals shown an advert for a receptionist vacancy were female.

As part of the mandatory selection process when creating an advert, Global Witness selected the objective of targeting those that Facebook thought would be most likely to click on the ad and it was only specified for each ad that it must be shown to adults who live in the country or had recently been in either country.

Relevance to the Reader:

This case study highlights the ingrained bias present in the algorithms that influence the content people see daily, particularly in job advertisements on social media. AI-driven systems, which determine ad placement, often reflect and reinforce existing societal biases, leading to disparities in how job opportunities are presented to different genders.

Social media has evolved beyond a platform for casual interaction; it now serves as a major source of information, support, and career guidance. However, algorithmic bias means that certain job roles may be disproportionately shown to men or women based on historical data rather than individual merit, limiting access to opportunities and reinforcing stereotypes.

Given the reliance of young people on social media for career-related information, it is crucial to raise awareness of this bias and equip them with critical thinking skills to recognise and counteract it. Encouraging transparency in AI systems and advocating for fairer algorithmic practices can help create a more equitable digital job market.