

★ Facebook's racial ad targeting

"Imagine if, during the Jim Crow era, a newspaper offered advertisers the option of placing ads only in copies that went to white readers," said Julia Angwin and Terry Parris Jr. in *ProPublica.org*. Facebook, essentially, is doing just that, through its targeted advertising platform. The social network allows advertisers to specify groups of users based on "ethnic affinities" in the Demographics category of its ad-targeting tool. However, "ads that exclude people based on race, gender, and other sensitive factors are prohibited by federal law in housing and employment." In a test we conducted, Facebook approved an ad that targeted house-hunting Facebook users and that excluded anyone with an African-American, Asian-American, or Hispanic "affinity." The company says "ethnic affinity" isn't the same as race, but is assigned based on the pages and posts a user likes on Facebook.

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★ China's 'credit rating for everything'

The Chinese government plans to assign ratings to citizens that will determine their ability to access loans, jobs, and even luxury hotels, said Josh Chin and Gillian Wong in *The Wall Street Journal*. A so-called social credit system is already being piloted in several Chinese cities, with the goal of a nationwide rollout by 2020. Under the system, black marks on a person's rating can be incurred for infractions like late bill payments or jaywalking, and scores can determine school admission or even "faster treatment at government offices." The program relies on government records like tax and loan payments and criminal offenses. But officials eventually hope to draw on data from internet companies, including social media use and online shopping habits. Chinese commerce giant Alibaba is experimenting with social-credit scores; perks for high marks include express screening at the Beijing airport.

Retail: Online shopping dominates holiday sales

"It's official: Cyber Monday 2016 was the biggest day in the history of U.S. e-commerce," said Phil Wahba in *Fortune.com*. Consumers spent \$3.45 billion online during this week's digital shopping event, according to Adobe Digital Insights, up 12.1 percent over last year. Shoppers also migrated online for Black Friday deals. An estimated 108.5 million Americans shopped online over the Thanksgiving weekend, "well above the 99.1 million who hit stores." Last year's numbers were roughly equal to one another. Online sales tallies topped \$5 billion for Thanksgiving and Black Friday, with Walmart, Kohl's, and Target setting company records for digital sales.

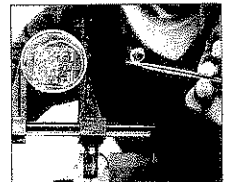


Opting for delivery over store lines

"Foot traffic at malls and shopping centers was thinner than the frenzied crowds of years past," said Sarah Nassauer in *The Wall Street Journal*. Many retailers rolled out discounts throughout November, offering many of the same promotions online as in stores. Perhaps as a result, the number of store visitors fell nearly 11 percent on Black Friday from last year, while sales dropped more than 10 percent. The holiday sales season is a delicate balance for brick-and-mortar retailers. Many have invested billions in e-commerce to fend off the likes of Amazon, but online orders are generally costlier for retailers than in-store sales, squeezing margins.

Innovation of the week

The prototype for a smart contact lens points to a future where "just about any object" can



connect to the internet, "even disposable ones," said Tom Simonite in *TechnologyReview.com*. Shyam Gollakota, an assistant professor at the University of Washington, demonstrated a Wi-Fi-connected contact lens last month at MIT to showcase a new technology dubbed "backscatter." Gollakota's method allows devices without batteries to communicate and power themselves by harvesting and recycling signals from Wi-Fi devices or radio and TV stations. Gollakota and his grad students have also created a skin patch that can sense temperature and respiration, and a concert poster that broadcasts snippets of a band's music over FM radio. Gollakota said his startup, Jeeva Wireless, is in talks with a large drug company about adding wireless connectivity to disposable medical products.

THE WEEK November 11, 2016

↑ Bonus articles (in case you have time/interest) ... why we are studying what we study in class! ↓