Prioritizing Minimalistic Design: The Negative Impact on Users' Control over Privacy in Facebook's Ad Preferences

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1. Motivation

Facebook **personalizes ads**
- Ad preferences shows user's categories
- Users can learn / control target categories

How does Ad preferences change in 2020 impact users?
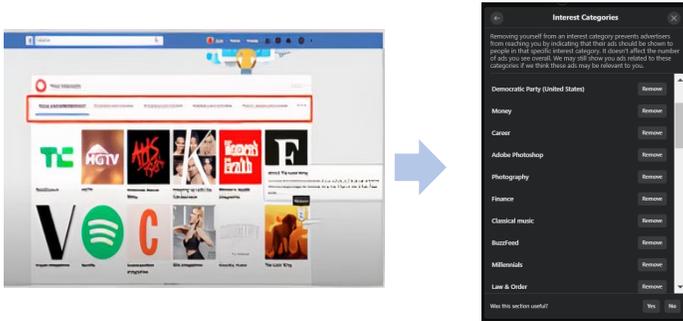
2. Methodology

Key idea: Use "switch to classic view" option

**Step 1: Content analysis** of interfaces
- Identify most changed sections

Step 2: Heuristic evaluation
- Using Nielson's ten usability heuristics
- Impact on privacy, ad targeting info, design
- Rating 0=no problem to 4=irrecoverable failure
- Scores are average of 3 usability and subject matter expert scores

3. Heuristic Evaluation

	Classic Interface		New Interface
	1. Visibility of System Status		
0	Shows if Alcohol, Parenting, and Pets are personalization criteria	2.67	Unclear how much these are criteria New criteria Social Issues/Elections & Politics
0	High level interest categories (e.g, news)	2	Cannot see high level categories
	2. Match Between System and the Real World		
0	Shows brand name and icon that matches real-world brand logo	1.67	Shows brand name only, can't distinguish brands (e.g., "Misfits" the band vs groceries)
3	User categories not always accurate	2.67	User categories not always accurate, but some categories no longer used
1.67	"Hide Ads" just removes ad topics as personalization criteria	0	"See Fewer" reflects that user may still see some topic-related ads
	3. User Control and Freedom		
0	Can turn off targeting for a persistent ad topic	2.33	User can only "See Fewer" of these topics
1.33	Non-Facebook activity: Course grain options to control personalization	0	Can view/specify which non-Facebook sources used to personalize ads
	4. Consistency and Standards		
1.67	Context-dependent menus, not always visible	0	Persistent button to Remove or Undo
	5. Error Prevention		
0	Can remove ad topics 6 mo./1 yr./permanent	2.67	Can only "See Fewer"
	6. Recognition Rather Than Recall		
2	Remove "x" button appears upon hover	0	Persistent buttons indicate available action
0	Pictures are much more memorable and recognizable	1.67	Relying only on text and no icons makes it harder to recognize a brand
	7. Flexibility and Efficiency of Use		
0	Utilizes visual chunking to group information	3.33	Categories and interests are compressed into flat lists
	8. Aesthetic and Minimalist Design		
1.33	Interface presents categories in many different screens, tabs, and sections, organized by themes	0	Categories and interests are combined into a few giant flat lists.
	9. Help Users Recognize, Diagnose, and Recover From Errors		
0	User can view/correct categorized interests	0	User can view/correct categorized interests
	10. Help and Documentation		
0	The classic interface had several pages of explanation about how Facebook ads work	0	FAQ's are now located at the top of each section to inform the user and answer common questions
		0	"learn more" links for each section that give additional information about the topic

4. Result Summary
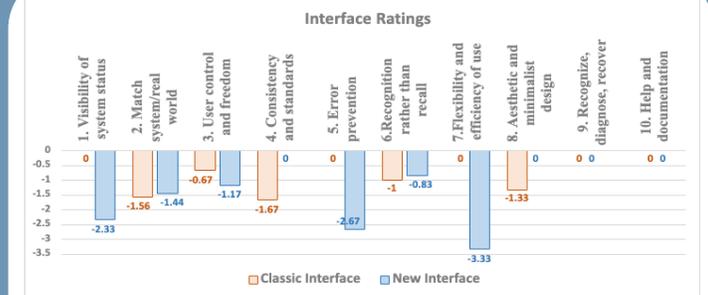
(Negative score indicates usability problem)

- **+** Prominent "remove" buttons
- **+** More FAQ and Help
- **−** Simplification, not transparency
- **−** Reduced user control over ads
- **−** Less visual representation

5. Moving Forward

Design guidelines to balance privacy and usability of ad preferences interface

Evaluate and contrast ad preferences vs. advertising interface which still offers pre-2020 categories and high level groupings