Editorial

During the pandemic, we are consuming digital services like never before. Aren't they just so convenient? But convenience comes at a price. Even Big Tech is getting more alert of the monster it helped create. In his talk at the Computers, Privacy & Data Protection Conference in January 2021, Apple chief executive Tim Cook acknowledged that the insatiable data hunger from evermore applications "degrades our fundamental right to privacy first and harms our social fabric by consequence ... If we accept as normal and unavoidable that everything in our lives can be aggregated and sold, then we lose so much more than data. We lose the freedom to be human."

An uncomfortable truth is that the marketing discipline is deeply implicated: Our desire to provide ever more sophisticated targeting of advertising, ever more personalized offers, or ever more automated services feeds the data hunger described by Cook. Digital marketing has brought an age of unparalleled insight into our customers' behavior, leading to many positive outcomes for both customers and companies. But it also has a dark side, one that we may have chosen to ignore for too long.

In this issue, we take a closer look at this dark side: What are unintended consequences of excessive use and the automatized processing of personal data? Do algorithms really act in consumers' best interest? Do they help us make better decisions, or has freedom of choice become a mere illusion? What is the role of data driven algorithms in the spread of fake news and the polarization of societies? Rest assured, we do not only point the finger at the dystopian consequences of digital marketing, we also present ideas about how to mitigate some of these harmful effects for individuals, for companies and for society.

Join us on our trip to the dark sides of digital marketing and back. We hope our articles provoke reflection and inspire you to examine your own behavior as a consumer of digital services and the role your business might play in creating the reality we live in.

Happy Reading!

Caroline Wiertz

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