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### **Targeted advertisements on social media benefit consumers**

Despite recent privacy concerns, research confirms that consumers benefit from targeted advertisements on social media.

“From a consumer perspective, targeted ads are a way to clear out the clutter and lessen the burden of choice,” said Brandi Watkins, social media researcher and associate professor in the Virginia Tech School of Communication.

Social media and websites gather data from users’ digital footprint which includes every time a user clicks, swipes, likes, follows or searches. This data tells marketers about a user’s interests, behavior, lifestyle and much more. Marketers use this data to target advertisements to specific individuals.

Marketers place targeted ads on social media platforms including Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, Reddit, LinkedIn, Pinterest, and Twitter.

According to Arizona’s Family Marketing Blog, many consumers find broadcast advertising, such as television and radio ads, annoying and burdensome. Although these mediums have a large reach, marketers have more targeting abilities on social media than is on the more traditional mediums. This allows the right consumers to see the right message.

According to PR Newswire, 52% of consumers can identify the benefits of targeted advertising. This includes finding promotional sales and incentives, discovering new brands, receiving personalized product or service recommendations, finding local businesses and having a more efficient online shopping experience.

“Targeted ads create a more personalized experience for consumers which can make them feel understood, foster brand loyalty, and a more positive overall relationship between the consumer and the brand,” said Shilpa Madan, assistant professor of marketing at Virginia Tech.

Consumers tend to trust ads on social media more than other advertising mediums because they usually appear in an organic setting. For instance, an Instagram ad pops up on the users’ feeds along with their friend’s posts. If done correctly, the consumer might not even realize that it is an ad.

According to Madan, since marketers create targeted ads based on the interests and needs of specific individuals, consumers are more likely to find these ads useful or relevant. In turn, this saves the consumers time and money by leading them directly to brands, products, and/or services that interest them. These ads often offer promotions and discounts to catch consumers’ attention and encourage a purchase.

Targeted ads help consumers discover new products or services. Based on consumers’ data, marketers can infer interests, behaviors and patterns. Marketers know consumers better than they know themselves. This concept allows marketers to show individuals products or services that they did not know they needed or wanted.

Without the use of targeted ads, consumers’ unique interests get overlooked and underserved. In addition, social media would not earn revenue without targeted ads and users would likely have to pay a subscription fee to access these platforms.

According to research by Exploding Topics, 80% of adults globally express concern about their online privacy.

“There is a general acceptance among the public as long as consumers are not experiencing harm as a result of marketers gathering their data,” Watkins said. “The problem arises when consumers are not aware that organizations collect their data and don’t know how they use it.”

Organizations have a responsibility to use consumers’ data ethically and transparently. To alleviate public worry and fear about targeted advertising, public outreach and education about data practices are essential. Since consumers benefit from targeted advertising, knowledge is power regarding data privacy.

Overall, consumers have varying opinions related to targeted ads. Some find them creepy or invasive, while others find them helpful and appreciate personalization. Marketers strive to benefit consumers without invading their privacy. The goal of targeted ads is not to make consumers uncomfortable. If consumers receive education on how organizations use their data and understand the terms that they agree to on social media, there should be no concern.

According to Exploding Topics, 1 in 4 Americans encounters the opportunity to agree or disagree with a privacy policy every day. In order to make informed decisions when asked to opt in or opt out of these privacy policies, consumers must understand the topic and organizations must be transparent about their intended use of this data.

Most social media platforms and websites only collect fundamental information, according to Forbes. When they do gather consumers’ data, they only use this information for user experience purposes.

Amid these privacy concerns, targeted advertisements enhance the consumer shopping experience. Forbes states that 2 out of 3 consumers use social media to make purchase-related

decisions. In this sense, targeted ads act as a sort of personal shopper while saving consumers time and money.

According to Forbes, 91% of consumers said they would more likely purchase from a brand that uses personalized communication. Consumers want to feel appreciated and heard by the brands they consume and constantly search for personalized experiences and brands to fulfill this desire with targeted ads.

Brand loyalty benefits the consumer just as much as the brand. Personalized two-way communication, often through social media, fosters consumer-brand relationships. When brand loyalty exists, the brand listens to the consumers' feedback to better meet their wants and needs.

Targeted advertising is here to stay as broadcast advertising dwindles. While some consumers may still feel uneasy about receiving targeted ads, this anxiety can decrease by looking into social media privacy agreements. Once exposed to this information, consumers can choose, based on their comfort level, to opt in or opt out of data collection. Consumers can also choose not to use specific social media platforms to prevent feelings of invasion of privacy.

Overall, research and experts confirm that the benefits of targeted ads for consumers vastly outweigh the possible negatives of data privacy.