When Targeting Meets Product Sensitivity: How Demographic and Behavioral Targeting Activate Persuasion Knowledge and Consumer Coping

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Declaration of Interest

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Abstract

As targeted advertising becomes increasingly prevalent on social media platforms, understanding how consumers interpret and respond to different targeting strategies has become an important issue. Drawing on the Persuasion Knowledge Model and privacy calculus theory, this study examines how advertising targeting type (demographic vs. behavioral targeting) influences consumers' coping responses to targeted advertising through persuasion knowledge and subsequent risk–benefit assessments. In addition, this research investigates the moderating role of product sensitivity in shaping these processes. Using a 2 (targeting type) × 2 (product sensitivity) online experiment with 283 participants, the results reveal a significant interaction between targeting type and product sensitivity on persuasion knowledge. Behavioral targeting generated higher persuasion knowledge than demographic targeting when the advertised product was sensitive. Persuasion knowledge increased perceived risk but did not significantly reduce perceived benefit. Perceived risk subsequently increased consumers' coping strategies, including ad blocking, support for data control policies, and willingness to delete personal information. Moderated mediation analyses further show that the indirect effects of targeting type on coping behaviors operate primarily through persuasion knowledge and perceived risk in sensitive product contexts. These findings extend persuasion knowledge research by identifying product sensitivity as a boundary condition shaping consumer responses to targeted advertising.

Keywords: Targeted ad, persuasion knowledge, privacy calculus theory, product sensitivity, coping behavior