

The creepiness factor of (sensitive) online personalized advertisements

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Abstract

Online marketing techniques must frequently face ethical questions. In many cases, "dark patterns" are denounced, also characterized as "deception by design" (e. g. disguised ads). However, personalized advertising also repeatedly comes into the crosshairs of discussion, especially when experienced as creepy (e. g. Stevens, 2016). Our study shows that it is debatable not only from an ethical but also from a marketing point of view to run extremely personalized advertising. Following a 2 (creepiness of personalized advertising situation high vs. low) x 2 (product regarded as sensitive vs. not sensitive) scenario-based between-subjects design based on one online experiment, our study shows that consumers react on creepy advertising with more negative word-of-mouth and lower appreciation for the product. Effects are partially mediated by consumer anger and privacy concerns, but product category is of less relevance. Results reflect indication for marketers to wary of over-personalization.

Keywords: *creepiness; personalization; advertising*

Track: Social Responsibility & Ethics