

Does Advertising Personalization Signal “Already Customized”? How Highly Personalized Ads Shape Customization Expectations

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Abstract

Digital technology, especially AI, allows firms to address consumers with highly personalized advertising at scale. At the same time, consumers can tailor many products and services to their needs using customization opportunities. We examine whether consumers infer that offerings promoted in a personalized (vs. generic) ad are already customized to their needs, thus reducing their opportunities to customize an offering themselves, and how such inferences shape responses to the ad and the product. Study 1 shows that ad personalization decreases customization expectations for a vacation service, while Study 2 shows no effect for a sports product. Study 2 further finds that explicitly mentioning customization options increases customization expectations regardless of personalization level. Study 3 shows that inaccurate personalization (ads addressing the wrong traits) does not harm customization expectations or affect attitudes toward the ad or product.

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