



ARF Study Finds Consumers Express Equal Resistance to Cohort Ad Targeting and Individual Ad Targeting

Fourth annual Privacy Study explores consumer beliefs and actions around trust in institutions and data privacy

New York, NY, January 20, 2022 — When it comes to using their data for targeted advertising, US consumers express just as much resistance to being placed in target segments as they do to being targeted individually, according to the fourth annual ARF (Advertising Research Foundation) Privacy Study released today. However, the study also found that major resistance to targeted advertising is confined to only 25% to 40% of the population, depending on the source of the targeting information.

Regarding consumer data protection, specifically, there is much greater trust in financial (63%) and medical institutions (57%) than in digital advertisers (18%) and social media platforms (23%). Less than half of US consumers trust any organizations to give them the ability to correct or delete personal data, control over how their data is used and/or to use consumer data for the consumer's own benefit.

“The findings of our fourth annual privacy study point to the hard truth that it may be just as difficult, if not more so, to explain the benefits of placing consumers into segments as it is to persuade them of the benefits of individual-level tracking, which throws a wrench into the idea of cohort targeting,” said Paul Donato, Chief Research Officer at the ARF. “Since consumers are more trusting of institutions with which they have personal relationships, such as banks and doctors, to manage their data, it appears that advertisers that can develop strong first-party relationships with consumers will have an advantage in this privacy-centric era.”

Additional survey findings include:

- **Trust in scientists declines while social media increases:** More than a year into the pandemic, consumer trust in scientists and technical experts appears to have declined slightly compared to 2020. Additionally, despite the public backlash social media companies have received, almost half (49%) of consumers reported trust in such platforms that they use frequently.
- **Exchange data for ad relevance:** Consumers are least likely to share their Social Security number, financial and medical information, as well as their home address and phone number(s). However, the idea of seeing more relevant ads appears to enhance willingness to share most types of information. For example, the number of consumers willing to share their Social Security number almost doubles from 14% to 27% when dangling the prospect of relevant ads.

- **Irrelevant ads:** Despite the industry’s efforts to deliver messages to narrower and more precise consumer targets, less than one quarter of consumers consider the ads they see in each electronic channel to be “usually relevant.”
- **Privacy is misunderstood:** Some privacy policy terms that are used in other contexts, such as “personalized” and “platforms” are widely understood by consumers, while terms like “PII” and “cookie” are not. However, younger consumers and those with graduate degrees are more likely to understand these terms.
- **Most consumers aren’t optimizing for privacy:** Vigilance in taking actions to preserve privacy, such as frequently changing privacy settings or updating ad blockers, is limited to 15% to 25% of consumers. Far more people rarely or never take such actions, while about one-third sometimes take these sorts of measures to protect their privacy.

The ARF’s annual Privacy Study was launched in 2018 as part of an initiative to advance data privacy and protection guidelines for the advertising industry.

To see the full findings of the survey, visit: [Privacy Study](#)

Study Methodology:

The ARF conducted its fourth annual Privacy Study by surveying over 1,200 US consumers in mid-2021. All four surveys were conducted using a Qualtrics online sample and platform, with quotas for age, gender and region, based on the distribution of the US population. While last year’s study featured questions centered on the pandemic, the section on privacy and personal data use was expanded this year amid privacy changes facing the industry.

About The ARF

Founded more than 80 years ago, the ARF is dedicated to creating, curating and sharing objective, industry-level advertising research to enable members to make a true impact on their advertising and build marketing leadership within their organizations. It has more than 400 members from leading brand advertisers, agencies, research firms and media-tech companies. For more information, visit www.thearf.org.

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