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Investigating the Termination of Third-Party Cookies: Strategic and Ethical Implications for Marketers

Abstract

The termination of third-party cookies signifies a paradigm shift in digital marketing, compelling practitioners to reconsider long-standing models of personalisation, targeting, and measurement.

This study investigates the strategic and ethical implications of this transition, exploring how marketers are adapting through the adoption of first-party data strategies, privacy-first technologies, and contextual advertising. Drawing on qualitative interviews with fifteen senior marketing professionals across sectors including retail, technology, and non-profit, the research employs thematic analysis to uncover tensions between compliance, creativity, and consumer trust.

Key insights reveal that while first-party data fosters direct relationships and reinforces consent-driven engagement, privacy-first technologies introduce analytical opacity that unsettles traditional performance metrics. Contextual advertising, meanwhile, reemerges as a trustworthy yet conversion-challenged alternative. The findings underscore that trust is evolving from a soft principle to a measurable strategic asset.

The study contributes to both academic discourse and marketing practice by illustrating how theoretical frameworks, such as Privacy Calculus, the TOE model, and the Elaboration Likelihood Model, manifest within real-world organisational pivots. The paper advocates for a redefinition of marketing effectiveness grounded in transparency, ethics, and user respect in an increasingly regulated digital environment.

Keywords: Third-Party Cookies, First-Party Data, Privacy-First Marketing, Contextual Advertising, Consumer Trust, Marketing Ethics



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