

# Targeting in the Dark: Nearly 70% of 'Parents' Targeted by Ads Don't Have Kids

*New analysis by Adlook highlights socio-demographic targeting inaccuracies, wasting ad spend, and missing real consumer connections*

NEW YORK, NY, UNITED STATES, March 13, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- [Adlook](#), a global media tech company specializing in digital advertising solutions, today announced the findings of an eye-opening study on the reliability of socio-demographic targeting — grouping audiences based on a combination of social and demographic traits, like age, gender, income, and lifestyle — in digital advertising. The results reveal major flaws in traditional socio-demographic targeting, highlighting the need for more accurate solutions that also align with the shift toward privacy-conscious marketing.

“Our analysis reveals that brands often rely on outdated demographic segments, resulting in inefficient and costly campaigns,” said Mateusz Jedrocha, Chief Product Officer at Adlook. “Legacy media-buying strategies and limited offline tools, like panels, force complex consumer profiles into broad categories such as ‘Women 20-44.’ In today’s digital age, this is unnecessary—brands can now target consumers based on real interests and behaviors, reducing wasted spend and reliance on outdated assumptions.”

## The Study

Adlook conducted its study in September 2024, surveying 1,325 online respondents in the U.S. The methodology involved a two-step process that combined user polling with bid request data analysis via Adlook to assess the reliability of socio-demographic targeting.

1. **Validation:** Survey respondents were polled to determine whether they identified with the socio-demographic segments they were targeted for, based on third-party cookie-derived signals present in bid request data.
2. **Overlap Analysis:** The study then compared the survey results to the bid request data to examine whether segments designed to be mutually exclusive (e.g., “Men” vs. “Women” or “Age < 34” vs. “Age > 55”) were accurately delineated, or if significant overlap occurred.

Control questions were also included to ensure data integrity by filtering out respondents who provided random or inconsistent answers.

## Key Findings

The study highlighted substantial challenges in the accuracy of socio-demographic targeting, with a key insight being the disconnect between targeting assumptions and actual audience composition:

- Precision Issues: For the commonly targeted segment of “Women 18-24,” for example, precision was found to be less than 20%. Among those targeted, 43% were men, 61% were over 24 years old (35% were above 55), and only 18% were women aged 18-24.
- Parental Status Misclassification: In the “Moms” segment, 52% of the targeted users identified as men, and 62% reported not having children. Similarly, 67% of users in the “Parents” segment declared they did not have children.

Across broader categories, inaccuracies persisted. For instance:

- 40% of users categorized as primary residence owners were actually renters, and vice versa.
- 67% of those targeted at a secondary school education level reported having a college or university degree.
- Half of the “Women” segment were men, and 76% of users targeted as “Married” declared they were not married.

“This is the inevitable outcome of flattening nuanced audience insights into simplistic demographic assumptions that rarely align with real-world behavior,” said Jedrocha. “The result is wasted ad spend and reduced campaign effectiveness.”

## Insights on Segment Overlaps

Even simple socio-demographic segments that should be mutually exclusive revealed significant overlaps, meaning the same users were inaccurately classified into multiple, conflicting categories. For example:

- 35% of impressions were simultaneously eligible for both the “Women” and “Men” segments, while 55% fell into two or more age groups, demonstrating significant classification errors
- 28% of impressions were eligible for both the “Age < 34” and “Age > 55” segments.

“These findings expose a critical issue in digital advertising that too many are scared to call out around the lack of accuracy in socio-demographic targeting,” said Jedrocha. “But it’s not just about data accuracy; it’s about moving beyond outdated, simplistic audience definitions. Brands must adopt solutions that embrace the complexity of modern consumer behavior while improving transparency, reducing costs, and being privacy-centered.”

Adlook’s deep learning-powered solutions, such as [Adlook Smart](#) and [Adlook Outcomes](#), are designed to address these challenges by offering guaranteed media quality and measurable

outcomes without dependency on third-party cookies. These tools empower advertisers to reduce waste, enhance transparency, and achieve better results in a rapidly evolving digital landscape.

## About Adlook

Adlook is a media tech company reshaping the future of programmatic advertising with privacy-first solutions.

Powered by our proprietary Deep-Learning Bidder, Adlook empowers leading brands and agencies to drive unmatched results. We're proud to bring programmatic back to its original vision - maximizing effectiveness and delivering unmatched audience planning to our Clients.

As early adopters of Chrome's Privacy Sandbox and Protected Audience API, Adlook leads the shift toward a cookieless future. With innovative solutions like Deep Search, Deep Context, and ContentGPT, we help brands transition smoothly from cookie-based to privacy-first advertising.

Ready to future-proof your programmatic campaigns?  
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