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Privacy or Performance? The GDPR's Impact on Online Advertising [Working Title]

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Motivation:

Since its enforcement in May 2018, the GDPR has reshaped consent and data-minimisation practices in online advertising. Consumers now control their personal data more directly, potentially improving privacy and trust. At the same time, tighter restrictions on behavioral tracking can reduce targeting accuracy and lower ad revenues that fund quality content. Publishers may see declining ad income, yet some have maintained or grown revenue by collecting first-party data and using contextual targeting or cohort-based methods. Evidence remains mixed: certain platforms report significant revenue losses post-GDPR, while others thrive under privacy-focused models. This uncertainty makes it difficult to assess whether GDPR ultimately benefits or burdens different ecosystem participants.

Goal:

This proposal focuses on the theoretical and empirical implications of the GDPR for key ecosystem actors—advertisers, publishers, ad-tech intermediaries, and end users. The research can be structured around the following non-exhaustive list of questions:

- What is the GDPR and how does it alter consent requirements and data-minimisation in online advertising?
- How has GDPR been implemented and propagated across advertisers, publishers, and ad-tech intermediaries?
- What strategic responses have these stakeholders adopted to comply with or circumvent GDPR constraints?
- What are the resulting implications for advertising efficiency, revenue models, and content quality?

Starting Literature:

- Choe, C., Matsushima, N., & Shekhar, S. (2024). The bright side of the GDPR: Welfare-improving privacy management. *Management Science*.Choi, W. J., & Sayedi, A. (2023). Open and private exchanges in display advertising. *Marketing Science*, *42*(3), 451-475.
- Lefrere, V., Warberg, L., Cheyre, C., Marotta, V., & Acquisti, A. (2025). Does privacy regulation harm content providers? A longitudinal analysis of the impact of the GDPR. *Management Science*.