



ADVERTISING MESSAGE ATTENTION FATIGUE AND POP-UP ADVERTISEMENT ON YOUTUBE

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Abstract

This study examined Advertising Message Attention Fatigue and Pop-up Advertisements on YouTube. The main objectives were to determine the extent of exposure of YouTube users to pop-up advertising, explore their perceptions, investigate the relationship between exposure and advertising fatigue, identify behavioural responses, and recommend strategies to reduce fatigue. The research was anchored on the Individual Difference Theory and the AIDA Model. Utilizing a survey research design, a sample of 317 undergraduate students was drawn from a population of 1,800 at the Faculty of Communication and Media Studies, Imo State University, Owerri, using the Wimmer and Dominick online sample size calculator. Out of these, 285 were correctly completed and returned, representing a 90% response rate. Findings revealed that students are highly and frequently exposed to YouTube pop-up advertisements, encountering various formats such as pre-roll, mid-roll, skippable, and non-skippable ads. However, most respondents found these ads distracting, annoying, and intrusive rather than useful, leading to the development of advertising avoidance behaviors, such as skipping ads immediately upon appearance. The study concluded that students exhibit a negative perception of pop-up advertisements due to their intrusive nature, which contributes to advertising message attention fatigue. It recommends that advertisers adopt less intrusive and more engaging ad designs, ensuring placements that do not disrupt user experience while maintaining the persuasive goals of advertising.

Keywords: Advertising Message, Attention Fatigue, Pop-up Advertisement, YouTube Advertisement, Avoidance Behaviour

INTRODUCTION

The advertising landscape has evolved from the traditional marketing channels to the digital media platform. The digital ecosystem has presented us with an array of social media platforms for brands to advertise their products. Many companies use various social media platforms as advertising platforms so that they can reach more and more people. One of the famous digital media platforms is YouTube. Christopher (2019) posited that YouTube is the largest and most popular video distribution platform on the internet. It has over 4 billion hours' worth of video viewers every month and an estimated 250 hours of video content are viewed every day. Five billion videos are watched every day, over 1.3 billion people use the site and 300 hours of videos are uploaded each and every minute. He goes ahead to estimate that in the next ten years, not pay for a Television subscription because of YouTube.

Businesses can use YouTube to communicate with customers and prospects through a variety of channels. Huang(2021) notes that YouTube is used by 62 percent of businesses to post video content and this in turn helps businesses that supply goods or services, sell their merchandise, learn about new products and services, as well as enhancements to existing ones, through advertising.

Sebastian et al. (2021) YouTube is a viable social media/advertising platform that has grown to become one of the largest online video digital channels with over 2 billion users enabling advertisers to expose their products and services to potential customers. Berryman et al (2018) confirms that social media

including YouTube has emerged as an interactive tool for young adults with a considerable number of users falling in the age group of 18–34 years (Talwar et al., 2020a; YouTube, 2020)

Adesina et al. (2022) argue that the awareness level of YouTube users to YouTube advertisement categories is very high and they have always come across such advertisements when they visit the platform. With the infusion of adverts in YouTube content, particularly pop-up advertisement, there has been concerns in respect to attention span given by YouTube users who are exposed to an array of ads daily on the platform. YouTube users are now faced with a variety of content on YouTube, competing for their attention.

While several studies focus on YouTube as a medium of communication for advertisers, and factors that influence purchase decisions and behavior of brands, there is paucity of data on advertising message attention fatigue and Pop-up advertisement on YouTube.

Statement of Problem

The primary goal of digital advertising on platforms like YouTube is to capture attention and move the audience through the AIDA (Attention, Interest, Desire, Action) hierarchy. For advertisers, pop-up ads are intended to be high-visibility tools to reach the "digital native" demographic who are mainly the Gen Z and Millennials, who utilize the platform for education and entertainment.

However, there is an increasing disconnect between the frequency of these advertisements and the receptive capacity of the users. Despite the heavy financial investment in YouTube pop-up ads, it appears that the consistent and repetitive nature of these formats is triggering ad-avoidance behaviours rather than persuasive.

While advertisers continue to increase the volume and frequency of pop-up ads to ensure reach, this very persistence appears to be counter-productive, causing a psychological "shut-down" or fatigue among Nigerian undergraduate students. There is a lack of empirical data that concerns where exposure stops being persuasive and starts being alienating. If this relationship is not understood, advertising expenditures will continue to result in negative brand equity and wasted marketing budgets. Hence, the need for this study, which is to examine advertising message attention fatigue and pop-up advertisement on YouTube.

Objectives of the Study

The general objective of this study is to understand Advertising Message Attention Fatigue and Pop-up Advertising on YouTube. The specific objectives of this study are to:

1. Ascertain the extent of exposure of YouTube users to pop-up advertisement on YouTube;
2. To examine the relationship between exposure to YouTube pop-up advertisements and advertising message fatigue among users.
3. Explore YouTube users' perception of Pop-up advertisement on YouTube;
4. Identify the behavioral responses of YouTube Users resulting from advertising message attention fatigue;
5. Recommend strategic advertising strategies in combating advertising message fatigue.

Conceptual Review

Advertising Message Attention Fatigue

Advertising Message Attention Fatigue refers to a state where audiences become desensitized, disengaged, or irritated by the overwhelming presence of repetitive or intrusive ads (Lee & Ahn, 2022). Summarily, it is an active state of irritation and cognitive overload. Adesina et al., (2022) describes it as a psychological state where a consumer's cognitive resources are exhausted by the repetitive or intrusive nature of promotional stimuli, leading to a diminished capacity to process or respond to the message. In the digital era, this is often triggered by the high frequency of non-linear advertisements, such as YouTube pop-ups, which interrupt the user's primary goal-directed behavior.

YouTube

YouTube is one of the most preferred platforms for video sharing among the various platforms. According to Rich (2018), it is a video streaming service where registered users can upload and share videos with anyone who has access to the internet. The platform provides the ability to create, upload, share, like and comment on videos freely. YouTube statistics also show that YouTube is a media channel with over a billion users and it exists in over 88 countries (Huang, 2021). YouTube accounts are used by 79 percent of internet users (Dullaart, 2012). Every day, these individuals watch nearly one billion hours of videos on the platform that has racked up billions of views (Huang, 2021).

Pop-up Advertisement

Pop-up advertisement is an advertising format that interrupts video content on YouTube. Statista (2023) reports that the average YouTube user encounters up to 11 ads per hour, an exposure rate that has more than doubled in five years, suggesting a saturated environment that encourages fatigue. Bisatya(2022) states that Pop-up ads have a format that can interfere with YouTube usage activities and advertisements tend to be avoided by YouTube users. Huang (2021) posits that YouTube served more than 2 billion views a day and later made a leap of about 1 billion monthly active users within the same year. According to Cetin (2021) about 2.3 billion users utilize YouTube worldwide. Advertisers, therefore, exploring the platform, utilize YouTube through various formats like; pictures or banners, animated images, videos, audio, web pages such as online stores among others (Wang et al., 2014).

Empirical Review

Chan et al. (2019) conducted a study on the Perceptions of Irritation: The Impact of Ad-Content Incongruity on Internet User Experience. The researchers explored how the relationship between an advertisement's content and the host website affects user frustration. The study found that internet users are significantly more irritated by advertisements that are unrelated to the specific task or site they are currently engaged with. Participants perceived non-congruent ads as having no "real useful reason" for being there, leading to a sense of intrusive annoyance. The study recommended that advertisers should move away from broad demographic targeting and focus on contextual targeting, ensuring ads appear on platforms or videos with related themes.

Obono and Okonkwo (2020) conducted a comprehensive cross-sectional survey among Nigerian university students to evaluate the psychological and behavioural impacts of digital advertising on YouTube. Their findings highlighted a significant resistance culture among digital natives, with 81% of respondents identifying pop-up advertisements as inherently disruptive to their user experience. Furthermore, the study revealed a high rate of cognitive filtering, as 68% of the students admitted to completely ignoring ad content, a phenomenon the authors attribute to a survival mechanism against

information overload. The study concluded that advertising message attention fatigue is not merely a preference but a growing psychological state among frequent video consumers in Nigeria, the study recommended a strategic shift in digital that advertisers transition from interruptive pop-up models to native advertising /in-stream sponsored content that aligns contextually with the viewer's primary content.

Adeyemi and Ogunlade (2022) explored the effects of advertising fatigue on consumer attitude towards mobile video ads in Lagos. Using a sample of 400 participants, the study found that pop-up ads triggered cognitive resistance, and 62% of users experienced emotional exhaustion after prolonged viewing. The authors recommend that brands employ adaptive ad targeting to minimize psychological wear out.

In a localized study focusing on the Southeast region of Nigeria, Nwafor and Ekwueme (2021) examined the phenomenon of digital advertisement fatigue among undergraduate students in Enugu State. Utilizing a survey research design, the study established that a significant majority, 73% of respondents engaged in the deliberate ignoring of YouTube pop-up advertisements. The researchers attributed this high rate of ad avoidance to excessive repetition and a lack of contextual relevance to the students' immediate needs or interests. They argued that when advertisements are perceived as repetitive interruptions rather than informative content, the audience develops a psychological firewall. Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made: Digital marketers should leverage data analytics to ensure that pop-up ads are highly relevant to the viewer's specific geographic and academic context to decrease the perception of irrelevance. The study also recommended that brands look beyond intrusive pop-ups and explore influencer collaborations or sponsored educational content that provides value to the undergraduate audience.

Banerjee and Pal (2023) in a study sought to Explore Internet Users' Lived Experiences with Video Advertisements on YouTube. The study found out that the intense dislike for forced viewing associated with pop-up and non-skippable formats. Rather than engaging with the marketing message, participants reported performing extraneous activities during ad playback such as looking away from the screen, muting the audio, or engaging with a second device, thus, effectively rendering the advertisement invisible despite its forced delivery. Amongst other things, the study recommended that: YouTube and advertisers should provide more agency to the user, such as allowing them to choose when they view an ad in exchange for uninterrupted content later. The study further recommended a strict reduction in the duration of non-skippable ads, suggesting that anything beyond 10 to 15 seconds significantly increases the likelihood of total user alienation.

Theoretical Framework

Individual Differences Theory

Individual differences theory is a mass communication theory propounded by Henry Defleur in 1970 that states that people respond to the media differently depending on their psychological needs, and that people consume the media to meet those needs. In 1970, Henry De Fleur proposed this theory.

According to Anaeto et al. (2008), this theory assumes that: mass media audience are made up of a diverse group of people (in terms of psychographic features); and a large number of people would react to the same media messages in different ways. Based on the difference in their psycho-graphic characteristics. It states unequivocally that people selectively use media content because communications contain stimuli that interact with the audience's specific personality traits, resulting in differences in perception, cognition, and behavior.

The justification for using the Individual difference theory is that: The Individual differences theory in relation to this study discusses how the audience based on their various characteristics and preferences

pay attention to and perceive messages passed across by the advertisers and how their reactions to these messages vary. The advertisers and advertising agencies may create an advert that will appeal to the audience, but it is still the choice of the consumers to expose themselves to the message (selective exposure), pay attention to the message (selective attention), perceive the message (selective perception), and recall the message (selective retention) and this is where the categories of YouTube advertisements play a major role.

AIDA Model

This study adopts the AIDA model (Attention-Interest-Desire-Action) first proposed by Elmo Lewis in 1898. The AIDA model suggest that advertising should guide a consumer through four strategies. The four stages are: Attention, Interest, Desire and Action. AIDA attempts to explain an intended advertising process. While YouTube pop-ups successfully capture Attention (the first 'A'), the intrusive nature of the delivery prevents the user from developing Interest. Instead of moving down the funnel from Desire(D) to Action(A), the YouTube experiences a cognitive "block" known as fatigue. AIDA places importance on grabbing the attention first, but pop-up ads can break the chain leading to Attention, Irritation, Avoidance and lack of persuasion.

While the AIDA model remains the gold standard for advertising effectiveness, this study utilizes it as a diagnostic tool to identify the AIDA Gap; the point where forced attention leads to message fatigue rather than persuasive interest (culminating in desire and action) among YouTube users.

Research Methodology

The survey Research design was adopted as the research design for this study. It enabled the researcher to obtain data to answer the given set of research questions.

Population of the Study

The population of this study comprised of Undergraduate Students in the Faculty of Communication and Media Studies, Imo State University, Owerri. According to the faculty officer, the population of undergraduate students of the Faculty of Communication and Media Studies is estimated at about 1,800 students. The justification for using undergraduate students of the faculty of communication and media studies is that their field of study is communication and media; so, they understanding social media engagement and advertising.

Sample Size

A sample is the representative of the entire population. When the population is large, it is of great importance to draw a representative of the entire population. To determine a representative sample from the population of 1,800, this study utilized the Wimmer and Dominick (2013) electronic sample size calculator logic. At a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error, the required sample size was calculated to be 317.

Data Collection Instrument

The questionnaire was used as the instrument of data collection for this research work. The questionnaire which was designed to address the respondents was divided into two sections (A and B). Section A was used to gather the demographic data of the respondents such as age, sex and postgraduate level, while Section B contained questions critical to the research topic

Method of Data Analysis

The data that were collected through the use of copies of questionnaire were presented in tables by using numbers, simple percentages and mean analysis. This was done to give this quantitative study clearer understanding.

Data Presentation and Analysis

This section will focus on the analysis and interpretation of the data obtained from different respondents. A total of 317 copies of questionnaires were duly administered to the respondents, out of which 285 copies of questionnaires were duly completed and returned, representing a 90% response rate.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	118	41.3%
Female	167	58.7%
Total	285	100%
Response	Frequency	Percentage
Under 18 Years	91	31%
18-25	121	43%
26-30	73	26%
Total	285	100%
Respondents by Department	Frequency	Percentage
Journalism and Media Studies	46	18%
Mass Communication	71	25%
Public Relations	45	15%
Broadcasting	68	23%
Advertising	55	19%
Total	285	100%
Distribution of Respondents by Class Level	Frequency	Percentage
100	91	31%
200	149	53%
300	46	16%
Total	285	100%

The demographic data reveals a respondent profile dominated by females (58.7%) who fall within the 18–25 age bracket (43%). Furthermore, the data shows a significant concentration of respondents from the Mass Communication (25%) departments with a high representation of 200-level students (53%).

Table 2: Extent of Exposure of YouTube Users to Pop-up Advertisements

Response	Frequency	Mean	Decision
Very High	198		
High	66		
Medium	21		
Low	-		
Total	285	3.6	Accepted

Decision Rule: Mean \geq 2.5 is Accepted.

The data presented in Table 2 reveals a significant high level of exposure to pop-up advertisements among the respondents. The Very High category alone accounting for almost of the total samples suggests that the phenomenon being studied is a prevalent issue within this specific demographic. Notably, the complete absence of Low responses (0%) further reinforces the intensity of high exposure of YouTube users to Pop-up advertisements.

Table 3: Relationship between exposure to YouTube advertisement and Advertising Message Fatigue

Response	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Decision
I find it hard to process advertising messages after exposure to YouTube Pop-up ads	152	120	9	4	3.5	Accepted
The More Pop-up ads I see, the more I avoid engaging with the ad	119	94	47	25	3.1	Accepted
Repeated Pop-up advertisements reduce my ability to remember the advertised brand and message	133	119	21	12	3.3	Accepted
The number of Pop-up advertisements on YouTube makes me less interested in the content.	101	115	27	42	2.9	Accepted
Grand Mean					3.2	Accepted

Decision Rule: Mean \geq 2.5 is Accepted.

The data in Table 3 indicates a strong consensus among respondents' relationship between exposure to YouTube advertisement and advertising message fatigue. With a grand mean of 3.2, the study confirms that ad intrusion is a significant barrier to effective communication. The highest mean score (3.5) was recorded for the item concerning the difficulty of processing messages after exposure. This suggests that the primary issue for students is cognitive overload. Furthermore, the "Accepted" status of all items shows that there is a link between exposure to YouTube advertisement and advertising message fatigue.

Table 4: Respondents' Perception of Pop-up advertisements on YouTube

Response	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Decision
Pop-up advertisements as Creative/entertaining	64	30	79	112	2.1	Rejected
Pop-up advertisements as Interruptive/disruptive	111	134	23	17	3.2	Accepted
Pop-up advertisements as Business Strategy for marketers	96	82	77	30	2.9	Accepted
Pop-up advertisements are Irritating	95	144	21	25	3.1	Accepted
I am Indifferent about Pop-up advertisements	60	104	109	12	2.8	Accepted
Grand Mean					2.8	Accepted

Decision Rule: Mean \geq 2.5 is Accepted.

Table 4 indicates that with an average mean of 2.8, Respondents do not view these ads as part of the content experience, but rather as a barrier to it. The core of the findings lies in the high acceptance of Irritation (3.1) and Disruption (3.2). These scores indicate that the primary perception of pop-up ads is one of irritation and disruption. The only item to be Rejected with a mean of 2.1 was the perception of ads as creative or entertaining (2.1). This suggests that no matter how well-produced an advertisement is, respondents perceive intrusive delivery format (the pop-up) stripping away its artistic/ entertainment value.

Table 5: Behavioral Responses of YouTube Users Resulting from Advertising Message Attention Fatigue

Response	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Decision
I Skip the ad immediately	168	84	19	14	3.4	Accepted
I Ignore the ad and continue watching the video	103	98	58	26	2.9	Accepted
I Switch to another video	82	45	98	60	2.5	Accepted
I Report the ad	41	57	90	97	2.1	Rejected
Verbal expression of dissatisfaction to friends around	112	86	51	36	2.9	Accepted
Grand Mean					2.7	Accepted

Decision Rule: Mean \geq 2.5 is Accepted.

With an average mean of 2.7, the respondents respond to YouTube Pop-up ads by skipping, ignoring and verbally expressing dissatisfaction. The highest mean score (3.4) for Immediate skipping suggests that skipping has become a behavioral response. The only rejected item (2.1) shows that while the ads aren't being reported, their messages are being almost entirely bypassed by a skip-first culture.

Table 6: Respondents' preference for improving Pop-up advertisements on YouTube

Response	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Decision
Pop-up ads should relate to the video being watched on YouTube	168	84	19	14	3.4	Accepted
Pop-up ads should not appear too frequently when I am viewing a content on YouTube	103	98	58	26	2.9	Accepted
Pop-up ads should only appear at the end of the content I am viewing	82	45	98	60	2.5	Accepted
Pop-up advertisements should not interfere with the video I am watching	41	57	90	97	2.1	Rejected
Grand Mean					3.0	Accepted

Decision Rule: Mean \geq 2.5 is Accepted.

The most significant finding is the high acceptance of Contextual Relevancy (Mean = 3.4). This suggests that students do not find ads inherently bad; rather, they find them irrelevant. Furthermore, there is a strong preference for changes in ad placement. With a mean of 2.9 for reduced frequency and 2.5 for end-of-video placement, the data shows that the *timing* of the interruption is a major issue. Interestingly, the "Rejected"

status of the item stating that ads "should not interfere with the video" (2.1) is highly revealing suggesting that interruption must be responsibly done.

Discussion of Findings

The demographic data shows that there is a concentration among 18–25-year-olds (43%), thus corroborating with the findings of Berryman et al (2018) that “social media including YouTube has emerged as an interactive tool for young adults with a considerable number of users falling in the age group of 18–34 years.

The study first sought to establish the baseline of exposure among the target demographic. Data indicates a saturated environment with 100% of the 285 respondents acknowledging exposure, and reporting "High" to "Very High" levels of fatigue, it is evident that exposure is not very frequent and intense. These findings concur with that of Adesina et al. (2022) when he revealed that the awareness level of YouTube users to YouTube advertisement categories is very high and they have always come across such advertisements when they visit the platform.

In evaluating perceptions of Pop-up advertisements on YouTube, the study found a clear rejection of ads as Creative (Mean 2.1) and a strong acceptance of ads as Interruptive (Mean 3.2). This is a critical scholarly point which agrees with the findings of Obono and Okonkwo (2020) that highlighted a significant resistance culture among digital natives, with respondents identifying pop-up advertisements as inherently disruptive to their user experience. As Chan, Dodd, and Stevens (2019) argued, when an ad is incongruent with the user's task, it is perceived as having no real useful reason for being there.

For behavioural responses resulting from attention fatigue, the study reveals that fatigue leads to avoidance. The Immediate skipping of ads (Mean 3.4) is the most dominant behaviour, this finding supports that of Banerjee and Pal (2023), who found that users perform extraneous activities (like looking away) during forced viewing. Similarly, findings of Obono and Okonkwo (2020) concurs with this current study as students admitted to completely ignoring ad content, a phenomenon the authors attribute to a survival mechanism against information overload. There is also a significant social impact, with Verbal dissatisfaction (Mean 2.9) being a primary response. This confirms that ad fatigue is also a shared social grievance. The Rejection of reporting ads (Mean 2.1) indicates that users prefer skipping/ignoring rather than formal complaints, which allows the cycle of fatigue to continue unchecked by the platform.

Finally, the study provides strategies of combating Advertising Message Fatigue which is the roadmap for improvement. The demand for contextual relevancy (Mean 3.4) is the strongest recommendation from the respondents. This directly mirrors the advice of Nwafor and Ekwueme (2021) that digital marketers should leverage data analytics to ensure that pop-up ads are highly relevant to the viewer’s specific geographic and academic context to decrease the perception of irrelevance.

The preference for ads to appear at the end of content (Mean 2.5) aligns with Obono and Okonkwo’s (2020) suggestion to transition toward native advertising or value-exchange models. Most importantly, the rejection of the idea that ads should not interfere (Mean 2.1) proves that users are willing to accept ads if they are infrequent, relevant, and timed to respect the user's autonomy, as suggested by Banerjee and Pal (2023). Non-interference of pop-up advertisement with the video as well as non-frequent pop-up advertisements as better strategies for combating advertising fatigue. This aligns with the findings of Adeyemi and Ogunlade (2022), the authors recommend that brands employ adaptive ad targeting to minimize psychological wear out.

Conclusion

This study set out to investigate the phenomenon of advertising message attention fatigue among YouTube users, focusing specifically on the impact of pop-up advertisements. YouTube users derive gratification from YouTube and it can be particularly frustrating when Pop-up advertisements impose and distract them from the contents they are viewing. The intrusive and obtrusive nature of YouTube Pop-up advertisements makes undergraduate students of Faculty of Communication and Media studies, IMSU to perceive it as disruptive/interrupting as well as irritating and interruptive. It can be concluded from the findings of the study that Pop-up advertisements on YouTube shouldn't be entirely removed but it can be adjusted by: the pop-up ads not appearing frequently, the pop-up ads relating to the content being watched on YouTube, the Pop-up ads not interfering with the video being watched and the pop-up ads being placed at the video being watched.

Recommendations

Based on the finding from this study, the study recommends that:

1. Prioritize Contextual Targeting over Broad Demographic Targeting: YouTube Pop-up ads should be contextually relevant to the video being watched. There should be a synchronization in intended business strategy and the YouTube users experience.
2. End-of-Content Modelling as a strategic placement: Platforms and marketers should shift the placement of pop-up advertisements from pre-roll and mid-roll to post-roll (end-of-content) positions. This will provide users with more agency to choose their advertising experience rather than users feeling forced into viewing.
3. Reward Advertisements: YouTube digital marketers should be creative in ad placement by introducing reward advertisements. A value-exchange where the user chooses to watch an ad in order to get a reward like a game life, a data bonus, or an ad-free hour

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