

YouTube Advertising Influence on Reactance and Likability

Student Name

St. Norbert College

COME468

Abstract

The following research proposal explores advertisements and sponsorships on YouTube. The proposed research examines different types of advertisements and their effects on the relationship between viewers and content creators. The role of reactance in altering perceived likability of a YouTuber is investigated through a proposed experiment, wherein 200 college students are divided into four groups and asked to watch and respond to various types of YouTube advertising. The results of the study may benefit the mass communication field by providing insights into how advertisements should be utilized on YouTube to have the maximum positive impact for advertisers, YouTubers, and their viewers.

YouTube Advertising Influence on Reactance and Likability

At its most basic level, YouTube is an online platform, founded in 2005, which allows users to view, upload, share, and comment on videos (Bradshaw & Garrahan, 2008). As the platform evolved, however, so did its community of users. The extreme popularity of YouTube, combined with its dedicated legions of viewers, has drawn advertisers to the platform in the hopes of reeling in new customers. YouTube content creators - who have adopted the moniker “YouTubers” - are given the option to display ads on the videos they post to the platform. This is what enables YouTubers to earn substantial revenue from their content.

In its early days, advertising on the YouTube platform closely resembled advertisements in traditional media. Users were bombarded with billboard-like banner ads, generally displayed alongside the content the viewer was there to watch (Barnes & Hair, 2009). These advertisements were less obstructive and generally didn’t affect the user’s viewing experience, as they were not overlaid on the actual video content - unlike many of today’s YouTube advertisements. In its present state, there are several formats of advertisements available to content creators on YouTube, but for purposes of this research proposal, I will focus on three of the platform’s most popular options: skippable pre-roll advertisements, unskippable pre-roll advertisements, and in-video sponsored content (Pikas & Sorrentino, 2014). This proposal will examine the effects of different types of YouTube advertisements on viewers and the ways in which those advertisements shape the perceived likeability of the content creator.

Literature Review

The following literature review discusses YouTube as a content-creating platform and its broader effects on the advertising industry. The effects of parasocial interaction on users’ viewing habits will be addressed, and the relationship between advertisers, YouTubers, and

average viewers will be explained in further detail. This literature review also addresses the effects of inescapable advertising on levels of reactance, and how that reactance may affect the overall likability of a given YouTuber.

Parasocial Interaction

In understanding where the idea for utilizing YouTube and its creators as an advertising platform stems from, the concept of parasocial interaction becomes particularly relevant. Though the notion of parasocial relationships has existed for decades, the YouTube platform cultivates these interactions in new, increasingly intense ways. Parasocial interaction occurs when viewers form a bond with the individuals featured in the media they consume (Horton & Wohl, 1956). Those viewers, in turn, begin to see media personalities as personal friends. In many cases, YouTubers speak to their audiences directly through the camera, often addressing their fans as if they are holding an intimate conversation. Because of this seemingly-interactive nature of the platform, YouTubers come across especially relatable, which encourages the formation of parasocial relationships.

As Rubin, Perse, & Powell (1985) further explain, parasocial relationships are defined by viewers routinely seeking guidance from media personalities, seeing media personalities as friends, and longing to meet those media personalities in person. YouTube comments are full of fans expressing love for creators, begging them to visit specific countries, and even writing personal messages in the hopes that the creator will see them. The existence of these comments points to the conclusion that parasocial relationships are easily formed on the YouTube platform. Because viewers are more likely to take advice from people they consider friends, the videos of YouTube personalities seem like prime real estate for companies looking to promote their products.

YouTube Advertising Model

In recent years, a phenomenon generally referred to as “influencer marketing” has earned a larger role in the digital media advertising world, particularly on platforms like YouTube. With YouTubers gaining more and more popularity every day, some of these “influencers” have become celebrities in their own right. YouTube influencers are sought out by advertisers to promote their product to that influencer’s audience. A primary benefit of influencer marketing on YouTube is the amount of engagement it can garner. As Woods (2016) explains, “influencer marketing is essentially virtual word of mouth.”

Because of the parasocial relationships influencers form with their audiences, and because some influencers have the ability to reach millions of people with a single video, they have the unique potential to persuade their fans to become customers. For example, popular YouTube influencer, Tyler Oakley, whose channel has surpassed 8 million subscribers on YouTube, is involved in a long-standing brand deal with audiobook company, Audible.com. Approximately once a month, Oakley reminds his viewers in a video to check out the website, providing his viewers with “the hookup” for a free download if they sign up for the service. Consumers are more likely to positively react to an advertising message if it comes from a trusted friend or persona versus a sponsored message direct from a company (Horton & Wohl, 1956). This makes paid sponsorships very common on YouTube.

YouTube influencers also have the option to enable monetization of their videos through skippable and non-skippable advertisements set to play before or during their videos (Pikas & Sorrentino, 2014). Because viewers are used to seeing commercials and advertisements on other media - like television - these types of ads may seem less frustrating. Sponsorships, however, are often the main focus of an entire video, and it may not always be obvious at first that the

influencer is acting in the interest of an outside source. There is little research on the varying effects of advertisements or sponsored YouTube content on viewers, thus the following research question is posed:

RQ1: Is sponsored content in YouTube videos more likely to create negative perceptions of YouTube influencers than skippable and non-skippable advertisements?

Reactance

The possible responses of viewers to repeated advertisement exposure on YouTube may be explained through the idea of reactance. According to Brehm (1966), reactance is the reason that, when people feel like they are losing their freedom, they experience a strong desire to gain it back. This may explain why people who are forced to do something often feel resentment towards the situation. People are naturally inclined to preserve their established autonomy (Brehm & Brehm, 1981). In this sense, the use of certain advertising formats by YouTubers is reducing the freedom of the viewer by forcing them to watch something they did not ask for. However, Brehm (1966) also explains that reactance is relative. The more important a perceived freedom is to the individual, the greater the level of reactance to its removal. Time is precious to most monochronically-oriented individuals, so being constantly confronted by unavoidable advertisements on YouTube may be perceived as a significant threat to autonomy. Based on this research, it is predicted that:

H1: Individuals being presented with un-skippable advertisements or in-video sponsorships on YouTube will be more likely to experience reactance.

Likability

Furthermore, likability is the way in which an individual or entity maintains favorable qualities in the eyes of others (Reysen, 2005). As most influential YouTubers today essentially function as miniature media empires, branding and preserving self-image are crucial to maintaining popularity on the platform (Perry, 2016). As Perry explains, many of these big name YouTubers rely on successful advertising to make a living. If their likeability is threatened, so is their entire brand. When viewers process the messages in YouTubers' content, they are fundamentally evaluating that YouTuber's likeability and forming new attitudes about them (Roskos-Ewoldsen, Bichsel, & Hoffman, 2002). Based on research by Reysen (2005), likability is judged by the degree to which individuals find someone warm, approachable, attractive, trustworthy, etc..

In relating viewer attitudes towards YouTubers and YouTube advertisements, Fleck, Korchia, & Le Roy (2012) noted that the likability of an influencer impacts the level of perceived congruence between an advertisement and the influencer's personal brand, which then affects the viewer's predisposition toward the advertisement. If a YouTuber ranks well in terms of likability, fans of that YouTuber will be more likely to find their content congruent with just about any brand, which would in turn make those advertisements seem less disjointed and less off-putting. Conversely, if a viewer is unfamiliar with a YouTuber and does not necessarily have a positive or negative attitude towards them, congruence is less obvious. This would make advertisements more off-putting. Overall, based on studies of reactance and descriptions of likability, it would appear that:

H2: Regularly experiencing reactance in response to YouTube advertisements and sponsorships will negatively affect the perceived likability of the content creator.

Methodology

To test the hypotheses described above, the proposed study will examine the impact of various types of YouTube advertisements on the viewer's level of reactance and perceived likability of the YouTuber involved. The experiment will feature a 1x3 factorial design, testing skippable pre-roll advertisements, unskippable pre-roll advertisements, and in-video sponsored content. A control group will view YouTube videos with no advertisements at all.

Sample

College students who regularly watch YouTube videos will be recruited through St. Norbert College's SONA system. Approximately 200 participants will be recruited for this study.

Procedure

The proposed experiment will take place in a lab on campus. Once participants arrive, informed consent will be acquired from each individual. Without disclosing specifics to participants, they will be randomly placed into one of four groups: skippable pre-roll advertisements, unskippable pre-roll advertisements, in-video sponsored content, and advertisement-free.

Participants will be asked to view ten YouTube videos featuring advertisements corresponding to their specific group. For consistency, all videos across all groups will feature the same YouTube influencer, Tyler Oakley.

After viewing the assigned videos, participants will be asked to complete a questionnaire regarding parasocial relationships, reactance, and YouTube influencer likability. The anticipated completion time for these tasks is two hours or less.

Measures

The variables being measured in this study include reactance and likability. Reactance will be assessed using a modified version of the Hong Psychological Reactance Scale (Hong & Faedda, 1996). In order to measure levels of reactance after the viewing of the assigned videos, participants will respond to the following prompts using a 1 to 5 scale, with 1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree:

- I resist the attempts of others to influence me.
- I become frustrated when I am unable to make free and independent decisions.
- I become angry when my freedom of choice is restricted.
- Regulations trigger a sense of resistance in me.
- When I am forced to do something, I prefer to find a faster way to accomplish the task.
- When someone forces me to do something, I feel doing the opposite.
- I am likely to take advice from others.

To measure likability of the YouTube influencer, participants will be assessed according to a modified version of affective attitude scales compiled by Batra & Stayman (1990). A similar scale was also utilized by Fleck, Korchia, & Le Roy (2012). Participants will respond to the following prompts using a 1 to 5 scale, with 1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree:

- Tyler Oakley is someone I like.
- I would be friends with Tyler Oakley.
- Tyler Oakley is a good person.
- Tyler Oakley's content is high-quality.
- I am favorable to Tyler Oakley.

- Tyler Oakley's videos have value.
- I would willingly watch more of Tyler Oakley's videos.

Results

After the collection of the data, averages will be calculated from each of the separate experiment groups. The averages will relate to level of reactance experienced after watching the assigned videos and the perceived likability of the YouTube influencer. Next, the hypotheses and research question will be explored based on the above analyses.

Research question 1 (RQ1) will be addressed by comparing the likability averages of the different experiment groups. I would predict that those participants confronted with repeated in-video sponsored content will overall find the YouTube influencer less likable.

Hypothesis 1 (H1) will be addressed by comparing the reactance averages of the different experiment groups. I would predict that participants who experienced un-skippable advertisements or in-video sponsorships will experience higher levels of reactance than those who had the ability to skip advertisements or did not see advertisements at all.

Hypothesis 2 (H2) will be addressed by comparing the average levels of reactance in each experimental group to the average perceived influencer likability in each experimental group. I would predict that those groups who experienced un-skippable advertisements or in-video sponsorships will in turn experience higher levels of reactance, which will negatively impact the perceived likability of the YouTube influencer.

Discussion

While the proposed experiment would be beneficial to increasing the understanding of the effects of advertising on YouTube, the limitations of the study must also be addressed.

Limitations

Because participants in this study are pulled from a relatively small sample of college students, the study is not easily generalizable to the broader population. The proposed experiment also notably takes place in a lab, which represents an unnatural environment. This may affect the responses of participants as they are aware they are being studied. Lastly, it is difficult to predict how individuals will react to the singular YouTube influencer featured in the experimental design. Some participants may experience an innate dislike for Tyler Oakley without any regard to the advertisements in the videos. Less biased results may be reached by including a broader range of YouTube influencers.

Implications

Despite the limitations of the study, there is good reason to delve into the concepts it examines. There is a distinct lack of research on the effects of advertising on the YouTube platform. As YouTube has only been around for a decade, further research may be done as the platform continues to evolve. YouTube has begun to take itself more seriously as a media platform, and advertisers are beginning to realize its marketing potential. This study will help to explain the ways that casual YouTube viewers experience content when confronted with various types of advertisements. This proposed research may help average viewers decode why they experience reactance after being confronted with advertisements on YouTube and how that may unwittingly affect their opinions on various content creators.

Furthermore, this study may help YouTubers understand the effects of various advertising techniques on their personal likability. As a YouTuber's brand is their primary selling point, understanding which sorts of advertisements negatively impact likability the most may aid them in making future sponsorship decisions.

From a more general mass communication scholar's point of view, this study would be useful in examining the developing relationship between advertisers, YouTube creators, and the viewers at home.

References

- Barnes, S. B., & Hair, N. F. (2009). From banners to YouTube: Using the rearview mirror to look at the future of internet advertising. *International Journal of Internet Marketing and Advertising*, 5(3), 223. doi:10.1504/ijima.2009.026371
- Batra, R., & Stayman, D. M. (1990). The role of mood in advertising effectiveness. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 17, 201-214.
- Bradshaw, T., & Garrahan, M. (2008). "Rival forecast to catch YouTube". *Financial Times*.
<http://us.ft.com/ftgateway/superpage>.
- Brehm, J. W. (1966). *A theory of psychological reactance*. New York: Academic Press.
- Brehm, S. S., & Brehm, J. W. (1981). *Psychological reactance: A theory of freedom and control*. New York, NY: Academic Press.
- Fleck, N., Korchia, M., & Le Roy, I. (2012). Celebrities in Advertising: Looking for Congruence or Likability? *Psychology & Marketing*, 29(9), 651-662. doi:10.1002/mar.20551
- Hong, S. M., & Faedda, S. (1996). Refinement of the Hong psychological reactance scale. *Educational and Psychological Measurement*, 56(1), 173-182.
- Horton, D. & Wohl, R. R. (1956). Mass communication and parasocial interaction. *Psychiatry*, 19, 215—229.
- Perry, S. (2016). *YouTube Money: The Impact of Brand Management on Online Video Companies*. Rollins College. Retrieved October 26, 2016, from
<http://scholarship.rollins.edu/honors/32>
- Pikas, B., & Sorrentino, G. (2014). The effectiveness of online advertising: consumer's perceptions of ads on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. *Journal of Applied Business and Economics*, 16(4), 70e81.

- Reysen, S. (2005). *Construction Of A New Scale: The Reysen Likability Scale. Social Behavior and Personality: An International Journal*, 33(2). doi:10.2224/sbp.2005.33.2.201
- Roskos-Ewoldsen, D. R., Bichsel, J., & Hoffman, K. (2002). The Influence of Accessibility of Source Likability on Persuasion. *Journal Of Experimental Social Psychology*, 38(2).
- Rubin, A. M., Perse, E. M., & Powell, R. A. (1985). Loneliness, parasocial interaction, and local television news viewing. *Human Communication Research*, 12, 155–180.
doi:10.1111/j.1468-2958.1985.tb00071.x
- Woods, S. "#Sponsored: The Emergence of Influencer Marketing" (2016). *University of Tennessee Honors Thesis Projects*. http://trace.tennessee.edu/utk_chanhonoproj/1976