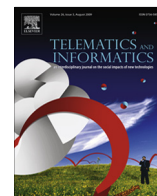




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# User adaptation to interactive advertising formats: The effect of previous exposure, habit and time urgency on ad skipping behaviors

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## ABSTRACT

Due to commercial information loss of efficacy, social media advertising introduced skippable formats as an interactive function to attract customers. This empowerment of users could also favor the development of their skills and strategies to deal with online advertising, which may result in a lower advertising effectiveness. A study with 286 YouTube users was carried out to investigate this adaptation process to an advertising format by focusing on pre-roll skippable video ads. In contrast to advertisers' approach (e.g. improving the persuasiveness of the ad), our research deepens on the ad skipping phenomenon from a human and context based perspective. In favor of an ad avoidance training effect, the findings show that participants previously exposed to a skippable ad are faster in taking the decision to watch or skip a subsequent ad. Participants' skipping habits and time urgency are also revealed as main determinants of different ad skipping behaviors. This innovative research provides empirical support for the adaptation process leading people's interrelation with interactive advertising formats. Practical and theoretical consequences are discussed for advancing on this underexplored topic.

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## 1. Introduction

Leading social media platforms, such as Facebook and YouTube, are becoming the main channel for accessing social information and audiovisual entertaining. In this context, social media members are no longer passive media users, but they play an active and central role in their online experience decisions (Ha, 2003, 2017; Hofacker and Belanche, 2016). The great number of possible reactions to Facebook contents (beyond "like") is an example of the user-centered interactive features implemented to increase users' control and satisfaction (Kim et al., 2015). Social media growth and their evolution towards advertising businesses have moved and adapted advertisements to online social media. Digital advertising revenue increased a 20% in 2016, led by Facebook and Google with a 43% and 60% increase respectively (IAB, 2016). In addition, to revert advertising loss of efficiency and reduce ad clutter perception, interactive features are also being applied to new advertising formats (Pescher et al., 2014). For instance, in 2014, all top 100 global brands used skippable YouTube ads (Connolly, 2015), and a 12% of the leading US brands used Facebook autoplay video ads in 2015 (eMarketer, 2016b).

This research focuses on YouTube skippable video advertising as a prototypical example of human interrelation with interactive advertising formats. Despite the widespread use of skippable video ads, research on this topic is scarce and mainly

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adopted a marketing approach. A study carried out by Google researchers concluded that skippable formats are more effective to increase future search queries than non-skippable formats (Pashkevich et al., 2012). Recently, Belanche et al. (2017) described how different strategies such as including high arousal stimuli or insert ads on congruent contexts contribute to increase skippable ads effectiveness (i.e. ad watching, ad attitude). However, people interrelation and reaction to skippable advertising as an overall interactive format remains unexplored as a research phenomenon. In this respect, certain evidences suggest that users learn to deal with and get used to innovative advertising formats, which result in a gradual loss of efficiency of such formats. From a theoretical perspective, Liu and Shrum (2002) suggest that a higher active control of interactive advertising by the user increases self-efficacy and learning about the user of interactive instruments. They also propose that personal and situational factors may turn advertising interactivity into a detrimental choice (Liu and Shrum, 2002).

Complementarily, some statistical information also suggests that users get used to deal with interactive formats of online ads, and that they collectively evade ads through ad blockers. For instance, click-through rates (CTR) of pop-up ads started in 1994 at around 40%; however they have declined to around 0.06% in 2016 (Cook, 2016). As well, the installation of ad blocking software is growing very fast in countries like the US, where the penetration rate has been almost doubled from 8% in 2013, to 15% in 2015 (Page Fair, 2015). However, despite this scare and though provoking hints, little is known about the interrelation process by which people adapt to interactive advertising formats such as skippable advertising.

To fill this gap, and assuming that both personal and situational mechanisms determine users' online behavior (Yu et al., 2006), we investigate users' adaptation to interactive advertising features. In contrast to research devoted to improve commercials' designs and persuasiveness, we explore the main antecedents of online video ad abandonment from a human and situational user perspective (e.g. Rau et al., 2014). More precisely, our research assumes an influence of ad avoidance training, and proposes that previous exposure to a skippable ad increases the odds of the next ad to be skipped, and to be skipped sooner. Additionally, considering that individuals are familiar with the skippable format, we conceive that users may had develop habits around this kind of interactive advertising; that is, ad skipping or ad watching habits could be guiding skipping behavior. Complementarily, we consider that ad skipping decisions may be highly motivated by the available time for each consumer, proposing that time urgency is crucial to determine ad skipping behaviors.

The remainder of this article begins with a description of the ad skipping phenomenon and the theoretical rationale behind hypotheses. Then, a pretest and a field study are carried out to ensure the validity of our main study, which consist of an experimental study in a lab setting. Results of the study are followed by a discussion section which contributes to better understand these adaptation processes and their influence on skippable video ads efficiency. Finally, we describe the main limitations of the study and suggest further research lines to advance on this field.

## 2. Background, literature review and hypotheses development

Skippable ads, introduced by YouTube in 2010 and later expanded to plenty of online services, represents around 85% of video ads in YouTube (Double Click, 2015). These interactive video ads (also called TrueView) are presented before users' demanded content. After five seconds of non-skippable ad viewing, the user decides whether to continue watching the ad or skip it. This format involves most of the core dimensions of interactive advertising such as user control, two-way communication, synchronicity or connectedness (Gao et al., 2010). Due to its extensive use worldwide, skippable ads represent a basic and prototypical example of fundamental interactive advertising. In addition, this is a preferred format among people because it increases user's control on advertising and it is perceived as a less intrusive practice than conventional non-skippable ads (Pashkevich et al., 2012; Belanche et al., 2017).

For a more complete understanding of the phenomenon under study, we conceptualize and analyze ad skipping behavior in depth. Previous research considers ad watching (versus ad skipping) as a clear indicator of advertising effectiveness (Teixeira et al., 2010; Puccinelli et al., 2015). Classical studies on advertising effectiveness already incorporated ad zapping and zipping behaviors in TV or video recordings as a proxy of ad intrusiveness or consumers' lack of interest on commercial spots (Heeter and Greenberg, 1985; Olney et al., 1991; Perse, 1998). In other media, scholars also used similar terms such as ad skipping (e.g. by newspapers' readers, Smit and Neijens, 2000), or ad acceptance (e.g. of SMS commercial messages, Sultan et al., 2009).

From a theoretical approach, Reactance Theory (Brehm, 1972), further developed by Persuasion Knowledge Model (Friestad and Wright, 1994), suggests that users tend to resist to communications perceived as intentionally persuasive by using message rejection actions (Petty and Cacioppo, 1981). Thus, skipping behavior is a mechanical avoidance strategy carried out by the user as the first and more basic step to resist advertising (Fransen et al., 2015). From this approach, ad watching should be also understood as an acceptance (versus rejection) of an advertisement. Indeed, ad acceptance has been conceptualized as a user willingness to receive commercial information, and to spend time or efforts to establish or maintain a relationship with the advertised firm (Sultan et al., 2009). In this vein, previous research found that ad watching is positively correlated with other ad effectiveness indicators such as ad and brand attitudes and negatively correlated with ad intrusiveness (Belanche et al., 2017). Therefore, we consider ad watching as an indicator of advertising effectiveness in terms of users' willingness to process commercial information in spite of the time or nuisance caused by ads.

More precisely, we focus on two simple indicators: ad watching length (time from the ad starting till user's decision to skip or to watch the complete ad); and ad skipping (as the percentage of users accepting or skipping the ad). Watching time length may be related to the willingness to deserve some time to the processing of the ongoing commercial information

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