

YOUTUBE AD RELEVANCE AND VIEWER ENGAGEMENT

A Study of Attention and Clicking Behaviour among Consumers in Ahmedabad

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Abstract

When people open YouTube, they usually want to watch a video, not an advertisement. An advertisement therefore has very little time to hold their attention. A message that matches a present need may be easier for the viewer to notice. This paper looks at whether users who see advertisements suited to their wants and needs also report watching skippable advertisements in full, paying attention to non-skippable advertisements and clicking on advertisements to know more. The analysis is based on an online survey of 1,009 YouTube users in Ahmedabad. Respondents answered four questions on a five-point scale from Never to Always. Frequencies, percentages and Spearman's rank correlation were used. Relevance was strongly related to full viewing of skippable advertisements ($r_s = .754$), attention to non-skippable advertisements ($r_s = .680$) and clicking on advertisements ($r_s = .669$). Each relationship was statistically significant at $p < .001$. Even so, 51.6 per cent of respondents said that relevant advertisements appeared rarely or never. Respondents who saw more relevant advertisements generally reported greater engagement. Since the information came from a survey, the results do not show that relevance caused these responses.

Keywords: YouTube advertising, ad relevance, viewer attention, ad clicking, digital marketing

INTRODUCTION

Most viewers come to YouTube for a video they have chosen. The advertisement placed before or during that video is not the reason for the visit. A skippable advertisement can be removed after a few seconds. A non-skippable advertisement stays on the screen, but the viewer may still ignore it. In either case, simply displaying the advertisement does not mean that it received attention.

A relevant advertisement gives the viewer a reason to notice it. In this paper, relevance means that the viewer feels that the product or service is connected with a present interest, want or need. Personalisation is one way of trying to achieve this, but personalisation and relevance are not the same. A platform may use information about a viewer to select an advertisement and still show something that the viewer does not need. The study therefore considers relevance as it was experienced by the respondent.

Earlier studies indicate that personalised advertising works better when people see some personal use in it. De Keyser et al. (2022) found that perceived personalisation improved click intention through personal relevance. Aiolfi et al. (2021) reported that relevance, usefulness and credibility helped people accept data-driven advertising. Privacy remains part of the issue because viewers may be concerned about how

their information is used. Chen et al. (2023) found that relevance shaped attitudes towards both the advertisement and the social media platform. This makes the responsible use of personal information important even when an advertisement appears suitable.

This paper examines whether YouTube users who see advertisements that fit their wants and needs also report paying attention or clicking more often. Three responses are considered: watching a skippable advertisement in full, paying attention to a non-skippable advertisement and clicking an advertisement to know more. Each one requires some response from the viewer and says more about engagement than exposure alone.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Targeting and relevance should not be treated as the same thing. An advertiser may reach the intended group and still show a message that is of little use to a particular viewer. Aiolfi et al. (2021) found that people accepted behavioural advertising more readily when they considered the message relevant and useful. The same study found that privacy concerns encouraged advertisement avoidance. Relevance is helpful, but viewers also care about the way their information is used.

Clicking is a more active response than simply allowing an advertisement to play. De Keyzer et al. (2022) reported that personalised social media advertisements improved click intention mainly when viewers considered them personally relevant. A click takes the viewer beyond exposure and towards further information about the product or brand. For this reason, the present study includes clicking as one of the three measures of engagement.

A video advertisement has to compete with the video that the person actually came to watch. Luo et al. (2024) used online and eye-tracking experiments to study attention to video advertisements. Relevant information about the available advertisements increased attention, reduced skipping and extended viewing time. Their study also showed that giving viewers a choice was not always enough. The information connected with that choice had to be useful to them.

The skip option gives viewers some control over the interruption. Lin et al. (2021) found a close connection between irritation and avoidance in YouTube skippable in-stream advertising. Yin et al. (2023) reported that perceived control reduced avoidance intention, whereas perceived intrusiveness increased it. Once the skip option appears, continuing to watch is a choice. Full viewing of a skippable advertisement can therefore be treated as voluntary attention. In the case of a non-skippable advertisement, completion only confirms exposure, so it is more useful to ask whether the viewer actually paid attention.

Attention to a non-skippable advertisement may also depend on the way it appears on the screen. Mancini et al. (2023) used eye-tracking and facial coding and found that interface elements shown with a non-skippable in-stream advertisement influenced attention, irritation and attitude. Their work shows why screen presence should not automatically be counted as attention. The present study looks at another part of that viewing experience by examining whether perceived relevance is associated with attention and clicking among YouTube users in Ahmedabad.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To examine how often respondents see YouTube advertisements that are relevant to their wants and needs.
2. To study the relationship between perceived ad relevance and watching skippable advertisements in full.
3. To study the relationship between perceived ad relevance and attention to non-skippable advertisements.

4. To examine the relationship between perceived ad relevance and clicking on YouTube advertisements.

HYPOTHESES

H1: Perceived ad relevance is significantly related to watching skippable YouTube advertisements in full.

H2: Perceived ad relevance is significantly related to attention given to non-skippable YouTube advertisements.

H3: Perceived ad relevance is significantly related to clicking on YouTube advertisements.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A descriptive and correlational design was used for the study. Data were collected through a structured online questionnaire between late 2024 and early 2025. The sample included 1,009 YouTube users from Ahmedabad. The questionnaire covered a wider range of questions about YouTube use and advertising. Four questions directly connected with the present topic were used in this paper.

The four questions asked how often respondents saw advertisements relevant to their wants and needs, watched skippable advertisements in full, paid attention to non-skippable advertisements and clicked advertisements to know more. The answers used the same five-point scale: Never = 1, Rarely = 2, Sometimes = 3, Often = 4 and Always = 5.

Frequencies and percentages were used to describe the answers. The relationships were tested with Spearman's rank correlation. This test was suitable because the four variables were measured as ordered categories. Statistical significance was assessed at the 5 per cent level. Correlation shows whether two responses tend to move together; it does not show that one response caused the other.

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Table 1 shows how respondents answered the four questions. Responses about relevant advertisements were concentrated towards the lower end of the scale. A total of 15.4 per cent selected Never and 36.2 per cent selected Rarely. Together, these groups made up 51.6 per cent of the sample. In comparison, 34.1 per cent selected Often or Always. The mean relevance score was 2.77, which lies between Rarely and Sometimes.

Table 1. Distribution of Responses

Variable	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always	Mean	SD
Relevant advertisements	155 (15.4%)	365 (36.2%)	145 (14.4%)	241 (23.9%)	103 (10.2%)	2.77	1.25
Skippable ads watched in full	106 (10.5%)	329 (32.6%)	217 (21.5%)	231 (22.9%)	126 (12.5%)	2.94	1.21
Attention to non-skippable ads	191 (18.9%)	270 (26.8%)	273 (27.1%)	111 (11.0%)	164 (16.3%)	2.79	1.32
Clicking on advertisements	106 (10.5%)	332 (32.9%)	256 (25.4%)	185 (18.3%)	130 (12.9%)	2.90	1.20

Note. N = 1,009. Responses were scored from 1 (Never) to 5 (Always). Source: Primary survey.

Among the four questions, watching skippable advertisements in full had the highest mean score at 2.94. Even then, only 35.4 per cent selected Often or Always. For non-skippable advertisements, 27.3 per cent said that they paid attention Often or Always. Clicking was not a regular response for most viewers either. It was reported Often or Always by 31.2 per cent, while 43.4 per cent selected Rarely or Never.

Table 2 contains the three correlation tests. Every relationship was positive and statistically significant at $p < .001$. H1 had the highest coefficient. The correlation between relevance and watching skippable advertisements in full was .754. In other words, respondents who more often saw relevant advertisements also tended to say that they watched skippable advertisements in full more often.

Table 2. Spearman Correlation Results

Hypothesis	Relationship tested	r_s	p value	Decision
H1	Relevance - skippable ads watched in full	.754	$< .001$	Supported
H2	Relevance - attention to non-skippable advertisements	.680	$< .001$	Supported
H3	Relevance - clicking on advertisements	.669	$< .001$	Supported

Note. All tests were two-tailed. Source: Primary survey.

H2 and H3 were supported as well. Relevance had a strong relationship with attention to non-skippable advertisements ($r_s = .680$) and with clicking on advertisements ($r_s = .669$). Both coefficients were lower than the value for H1, but the relationships were still strong. Across the three tests, higher relevance went together with greater reported engagement. These are associations within the sample and should not be read as proof of cause and effect.

DISCUSSION

The strongest relationship was between relevance and full viewing of skippable advertisements. This is understandable because the viewer can leave the advertisement as soon as the skip option appears. Continuing to watch is voluntary. The correlation of .754 shows that this choice was closely connected with how often respondents found the advertisements relevant to their needs.

This result is in line with the work of De Keyzer et al. (2022), where personal relevance helped to explain favourable responses to personalised advertisements. Luo et al. (2024) also found that relevant information could improve attention to online video advertising. A similar pattern appears in the present survey. Respondents who saw relevant messages more often also reported completing skippable advertisements more often.

The result for non-skippable advertisements needs to be read differently. Such an advertisement may play from beginning to end even when the viewer is looking elsewhere. Completion is therefore not the same as attention. Mancini et al. (2023) similarly showed that the presentation of an in-stream advertisement can change attention and emotional response. In the present data, respondents who found advertisements relevant more often were also more likely to report paying attention to the non-skippable ones.

Clicking involves a further decision because the viewer has to leave the video or open another page to know more. Its correlation with relevance was .669. This indicates a close connection between seeing a useful advertisement and taking an active step towards the product, service or brand. The result also agrees with Aiolfi et al. (2021), who found that relevance and usefulness contributed to the acceptance of data-driven advertising.

Relevant advertisements were not common in this sample. More than half of the respondents rarely or never saw advertisements that suited their wants and needs. The strong correlations therefore do not mean that YouTube advertisements were regularly well targeted. They show that engagement was higher among respondents who did experience relevant advertising. Showing more advertisements may be less useful than improving the match between the message and the viewer.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

Advertisers cannot depend on broad demographic targeting alone. An advertisement may reach the intended age or income group and still have little meaning for the individual viewer. The person's interests, the video being watched and the possible need for the product should also be considered. In a skippable format, the opening seconds matter because they must show quickly why the advertisement may be useful. Personalisation should not become so detailed that viewers feel they are being watched. Even a suitable advertisement may create discomfort when people are unsure how their information was obtained. Chen et al. (2023) found that ad relevance can influence how consumers judge a platform's use of their information. Advertisers should therefore improve relevance while giving viewers clear privacy choices and reasonable control.

Campaign results should also be judged by more than the number of views. A completed view after the skip option, attention to a non-skippable advertisement and a click all provide useful information about viewer interest. Looking at these responses separately can help advertisers understand where an advertisement is holding attention and where it is being ignored.

CONCLUSION

This paper asked whether YouTube users who saw more relevant advertisements also reported greater engagement. In the sample of 1,009 users from Ahmedabad, they did. Relevance had a strong positive relationship with all three responses: watching skippable advertisements in full, paying attention to non-skippable advertisements and clicking advertisements to know more. The strongest relationship was with full viewing of skippable advertisements.

Yet relevant advertisements were not common. A total of 51.6 per cent of respondents rarely or never saw advertisements suited to their needs. There is considerable room to improve the match between the advertisement and the person viewing it. The correlations suggest that a better match is associated with more attention and action. However, the survey does not establish that relevance itself caused the reported behaviour.

LIMITATIONS

The study relies on what respondents said about their viewing habits, and these answers may not always match their actual behaviour on YouTube. The survey was conducted at one point in time, so it cannot show cause and effect. Each concept was measured through one question using the same five-point scale, which may partly explain the size of the correlations. The sample was limited to Ahmedabad, and the results may differ in other places.

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