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INFLUENCES OF YOUTUBE ADVERTISING ON YOUNG ADULTS: A SOCIAL IDENTITY PERSPECTIVE

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INFLUENCES OF YOUTUBE ADVERTISING ON YOUNG ADULTS:

A SOCIAL IDENTITY PERSPECTIVE

by

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ABSTRACT

Social media sites, such as YouTube, have provided a platform for many individuals to have online communities and form their own audiences through their shared interests and a sense of belonging. YouTube exemplifies a social environment in which everyone has the potential to be both the consumer and the producer of content and suggests the speed at which social networking innovations can transform the way we interact with other users. Corporations began to deviate new strategies to engage this new online market and have created a salient area to study the potential problems that may arise when ads present cultural biases or unhealthy habits for the sake of profit.

This study explored YouTube content, its influencers, and viewers' experiences within the YouTube platform through the frameworks of Social Identity Theory and the Uses and Gratification model. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with young adults who are frequent YouTube users. The participants were asked regarding their habits and consumption patterns in relation to online advertisements and viewed content on YouTube. The prevalence of online socialization, personalization, and the aspect of convenient entertainment significantly contribute to the overall time spent online. The study found that constant engagement with YouTube normalizes the repetition of advertisements which led the participants to develop different avoidance habits to cope with unwanted advertising on the Internet. However, the results also revealed that advertisements were mentioned to be entertaining and participants would continue to watch them if the content of the advertisements were enjoyable and memorable.

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CHAPTER I - INTRODUCTION

Social Media

Social media sites have become an important platform for companies and

industries to connect with their target audience and increase revenue by building

customer networks. Modern technology allows people to connect from one domain to

another, improving our approaches to communication, information seeking, and access to

entertainment. Advertisements come in many forms. They play a fundamental role in

every business and change the consumption patterns of consumers. Corporations began to

deviate new strategies to engage online consumers and reduce market saturation. With

the rise of digital media, the effectiveness of advertisements has become a salient area to

study and online website such as YouTube, which is part of the Google Sites family, has

over a billion unique users visit every month (Goodrow, 2021).

Founded in 2005, YouTube is an online video platform that allows users to view,

comment, post, and share videos on the site. It is the third most used website worldwide,

with over one billion users who watch over six billion collective hours of video every

month, and are highly engaged in liking, sharing, and commenting on videos on YouTube

(Bradshaw & Garrahan, 2008). YouTube exemplifies a social environment in which

everyone has the potential to be both the consumer and the producer of content and

suggests the speed at which social networking innovations can transform the way we

interact with other users. This widespread growth of the platform has made an impact on

the way advertisers design their marketing strategies. There are two main types of

advertisement on YouTube: in-content video advertising and in-stream advertising.

Extensive literature revealed several types of in-stream video advertisement that may

appear during or next to the content within the platform which consists of: skippable video ads, non-skippable video ads, bumper ads, and overlay ads (Google, n.d.). Advertisements are presumably to be utilized to achieve consumers' hedonistic needs (Rodgers & Thorson, 2000), these different types of ads offer both skippable and non-skippable options whereas skippable ads are much longer n length compared to the fifteen- or twenty-seconds length for non-skippable ads. Above all, YouTube oversees its own partner program where influencers are recruited and provided benefits through sharing the revenue of YouTube AdSense. To promote content, YouTube introduced "Featured Videos" and "Promoted Videos" as sponsored videos. Featured Videos are primarily populated with videos from YouTube's thousands of partners and Promoted Videos are based on a new advertisement strategy of selling key terms and trends through an algorithmic system (Clifford, 2008). In-content advertising refers to sponsored videos that integrate the brand, product, or service into an influencer's content while providing social endorsements. This ensures that YouTube sponsored videos are effective in driving valuable reach and engagement for the respectable demographics of audiences.

Within the field of digital media, development, and policies are constantly evolving where the roles of the consumers and advertisers are intertwined. There are always advantages when branching out products to online advertising, although the digitalized space is often plagued by fraud and viewability issues where there is minimal recognition of ethical and social issues. Given the cultural widespread of young adults achieving conventional computer literacy, there is a small portion of studies regarding the content and effects of online advertisements. Unlike traditional commercials, YouTube advertisements are seamlessly incorporated into the content and with little to no

restrictions regarding the appropriateness of the adverts. Several motives and directions compel viewers to consume content on YouTube. Some viewers may visit YouTube for entertainment purposes while others resort to learning how to do something or partake in a meaningful discussion for online socialization. The internet allows advertisers to track and influence social media platforms as well as contacting influencers, to guide and monitor behavioral cognitions of their audiences to facilitate advertising messages as efficiently as possible. This allows users to move seamlessly between traditional mass communication activity of watching mediated content and interpersonal connection activity between the user and the influencers. Problems may arise when ads present ideals of body appearance and habits; adverts can convey cultural biases, such as skin color, unhealthy body ideals, and unrealistic solutions through consuming their products.

In sum, prevalent researchers examine the effects of different uses of the internet on consumers and their consumption patterns through different perspectives. The purpose of this research is to explore the relationship between individuals' self-identity and their attitude towards advertising messages on YouTube. It will also examine the association between the audiences' purchase intention and their responses to the advertising messages. Examining Social Identity Theory and other communication research to explore the effects of user-generated content of influencers and the relationship of brand images and representations. Given the lack of contribution to existing knowledge on the topic and increased concern over police objectives regarding regulation on digital advertisements, this study propose was to apply Social Identity Theory (SIT) and Uses and Gratification (U&G) theory to explore the influences of YouTube advertising on young adults and their association with self-identity and attitudes towards the brand.

CHAPTER II – LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Identity Theory

Our sense of self is produced by many factors. Tajfel and Turner's (1979) Social

Identity theory (SIT) suggests factors such as family, friends, surrounding environments,

and backgrounds shape our perception of reality. Although advertisings are not listed as

one of the key factors. Nowadays, the constant presence of advertising combined with

targeted advertising and group-based mass appeal of advertising is being implemented

differently across domains. In general, SIT and self-categorization (Turner, 1985)

propose that a substantial part of self-esteem is derived through group memberships that

form the midst of our identity-forming process. Advertising influences this process

further through its selection of aspects within social groups to highlight, niche advertising

may reinforce aspects and characteristics through repetition and often categorized

consumers as members of the targeted group. Behavioral marketing and design elements

are implemented into the digital design to guide users into specific behaviors while

maintaining an interpersonal connection with the audiences (Fogg, 2002). As a

consequence of categorizing non-members into out-groups, Tajfel (1978) proposes that

problems such as stereotyping are formed as is, based on a cognitive process, the

tendency to group things, to achieve the differences between groups, and the similarities

of features within the in-group. These behaviors may lead to unintended outcomes by the

practitioners such as discrimination and alienation.

Research has shown that group membership for social development and social

comparison are important factors for self-image and other individualistic benefits.

Moreover, group memberships are seen as valuable networks that establish a sense of

social identity and the formulation of belonging within the social hierarchy (Newman & Newman, 1976). They are also a source of emotional and instrumental support, providing comfort through a period of physical, emotional, and cognitive adjustment (Coles, 1995). Our interactions with the media are not purely for entertainment, but also as a part of identity formation – thinking about the type of person you want to be (Arnett, 2010, p. 340). By providing consumers a resource that feeds a constant flow of information, they use this information as a guide for social comparison. Hence widespread websites such as YouTube shares an important attribute with traditional television in that both entities are delivery systems for entertainment that are also filled with commercials and advertisements in-between. Unlike television, YouTube provides consumers with a platform to view videos and also share those videos with others. In an environment in which users can move rather seamlessly between viewing and sharing content, YouTube provides a research opportunity to consider that the field of advertisements are evolving and may lead to unintended consequences through long exposure to the medium, especially important considering younger viewers who are not supervised and where corporations capitalized on this trend and began to increasingly advertise their products and services through social networks.

DeShields et al. (1996) conducted a study to examine the impact of salesperson physical attractiveness and accent on receiver purchase intentions. Twenty-four broadcast commercials were produced through the incorporation of attractiveness and accentual elements, 963 subjects evaluated the product and service being advertised. Using SIT as the guide for comparison based upon the standards of the dominant group, such as Caucasian Anglo-Saxon males in the United States. The data revealed purchase intentions

were more favorably influenced by attractive salespersons' messages. Also, study findings indicate that salespersons with a standard accent or dialect were perceived more favorably and created higher purchase intentions than foreign-accented salespersons. Even when the information is all the same, the difference in information source can bring about a significant impact on the consumers' evaluation of information (Harkins & Petty, 1987). In other words, the receiver's perception of a given piece of information can be different depending on the information sender. Prior research called this phenomenon a "source effect" and has shown that it can influence consumers' perceived credibility for a particular piece of information and their buying behaviors (DeShields et al., 1996). As several major corporations have become increasingly competitive, sales managers have turned their attention to additional resources such as personal factors in order to maintain an edge over the competition.

Communities are created through meeting common needs. A study by Lozano-Blasco et al. (2021) demonstrate that gamers became a new social phenomenon of YouTube influencers whose success is based on their humor and social identity. The study found that teenagers use YouTube to search for content that is cheerful, fun, and with a high degree of humor and irony, in which influencers narrate their own vision of reality. The results of this study are similar to those found by Beers Fägersten (2017) on PewDieDie, highlighting terms such as 'bro', 'just', 'guy', and 'think', which he uses to communicate with his followers. Similarly, the use of personalization and direct language is an essential strategy in enticing and obtaining new followers, with appealing for interaction and referencing one's followers in videos coinciding with the research carried out by Pereira et al. (2018). In this way, we find how this virtual community positively

reaffirms those traits that confer a social identity. As indicated by Tajfel's theory (1981), a series of processes operate to achieve group identification. This generates a digital community of followers of an influencer whose identification reinforces their self-esteem through identification. This personalization and communication strategy seeks to generate an emotional bond and commitment, a parasocial relationship between the influencer and their followers.

<p style="text-align:center">Uses and Gratifications Model</p>

YouTube and other social network sites have been drastically increased in use and are often cited as a communication tool with diversified channels in comparison with traditional media (Chung et al., 2012). There are certain motivational factors that influence information sharing and content consumption. Based on previous studies in Uses and Gratifications, factors influencing motivation for using YouTube were divided into self-expression, involvement, social interaction, and information seeking. In this context, Social Identity Theory provides a theoretical framework that explores the capacity of individuals' group identification and their motivations to participate in the collective efforts to consume content on YouTube.

Uses and Gratification (U&G) theory highlights how and why people use media (Klapper, 1963). A psychological communication perspective that examines how individuals use mass media. An audience-based theoretical framework is grounded on the assumption that individuals select media and content to fulfill their needs or wants. These needs are expressed as motives for adopting particular medium use and are connected to the social and psychological makeup of the individual. It assumes an active audience,

which consciously selects content and media to satisfy specific needs or desires. The theory emphasizes that motives, attitudes, and behaviors related to media consumption will vary by individual. Rubin et al. (2003) explained that media behavior is purposive, goal-directed, and motivated. Individuals select media content to satisfy their needs and/or desires with social and psychological dispositions that mediate that behavior and the media compete with other forms of communication such as interpersonal interaction for selection, attention, and use. Research has shown that motivation influences communication behavior such as the selection, use, interpretation, and sharing of media fare (Haridakis & Rubin, 2005; Levy & Windahl, 1984).

Much of the past research on U&G has focused on television (e.g., Bryant & Zillmann, 1984; Rubin, 1983) and other traditional media, such as radio (Armstrong & Rubin, 1989), and telephones (O'Keefe & Sulanowski, 1995). This approach explores what motivates individuals to divert from traditional media to new media and what types of gratifications these are providing (Lee, 2008; Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000). Unlike SIT, U&G theory utilizes two principles that complement social development and group comparison: the audience is active in their selection of the media they consume. Another major contributor to this new media is interactivity, which describes the ability of users to provide content in response to a source or communication partner (Ha & James, 1998). In digital media, the distinction between consumer and producer tends to blur, which has led to the introduction of the term prosumer to describe the audiences' ability to take control over the production and distribution of content (Toffler, 1980). In addition, Chung et al. (2012) conducted a study based on the Uses and Gratification model and Social Identity theory. An empirical analysis on social media sites regarding various activities including

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relaxing entertainments, information sharing, escapism, social interaction, habitual pass time, and others through their daily online activities. Emphasizing that the audience have the various motivation and provided results that highlight involvement as one of the greatest effects on continuance motivation and other factors were also significant which included self-expression, interaction and media structure. They suggest that people tend to debate matters and facilitate social exchange on social media to increase the common bonds and identify themselves within online groups which are determined through both interpersonal attachment and group attachment.

Numerous motives and stimulations compel viewers to consume content on YouTube. There are many possibilities on YouTube that the viewer can decide what they find entertaining that can include; vlogs, DIY's, music videos, comedy skits, live shows, and many more. Some viewers may even resort to learning how to do something or partake in a meaningful discussion through online socialization. Rubin and Rubin (1985) explained that media behavior is motivated through a direct purpose and goal orientation. Individuals select media content to satisfy their needs and desires with social and psychological dispositions that mediate that behavior and the media compete with other forms of communication such as interpersonal interaction for selection, attention, and use which often lead to longer exposure to those selected media.

Similarly, Quan-Haase and Young (2010) conducted a study to examine and explore the gratification obtained by Facebook compared to Instant Messaging (IM). The authors applied a mixed-methods approach consisting of both surveys and interviews to qualitatively analyze the comparisons between the different gratifications each medium provides to university students. The findings that emerged from the data showed six

major themes: pastime, affection, fashion, share problems, sociability, and social information. This provides audience members control over the content and its use, making it important to examine the gratifications that social network sites may provide to its users in comparison to traditional media (Lin, 2001). To better understand these differences in the gratifications, the authors focus on the importance of social media and its effect to understand what motivates users to switch from one tool to another. The results revealed the co-current use of various tools suggests that each fulfills a distinct need analyzing U&G necessary, where social information emerged as a considerable element presented on Facebook compared to IM. However, both IM and Facebook are considered important tools for feeling involved with friends and family's lives while keeping up to date with their communities and a sense of collectiveness.

In-Content Ads on YouTube

Throughout this paper, the term sponsored YouTube content will refer specifically to videos produced by YouTube influencers and major corporations that have a presence within the platform. While online advertisements refer to in-stream and in-video advertisements that are accompanied by a banner ad at the top right of the screen and the sponsorship within the video content itself. In-content advertising refers to sponsored videos that integrate the brand, product, or service into an influencer's content while providing social endorsements. Influencers are aware and mindful to orient their character with brands that fit their interests so that the sponsored content resonates with their targeted audience (Hughes et al., 2019). This ensures that YouTube in-content advertisements are effective in driving valuable reach and engagement. Additionally,

YouTube may provide a trending page for users to view popular clips, they are a corporation that thrives from users using their site for a certain period with the incentive to put as many advertisements as possible within their site. The Internet has become one of the largest advertising mediums in the U.S. which has grown from $9.6 billion in 2004 to $41.5 billion in 2020 (IAB, 2021). Thousands of advertisers have turned to the Internet as a prospective media for promoting their brands and products. Internet advertising provides advertisers with an efficient and less expensive way of reaching the consumers most interested in their products and services. A growing stream of product placement research has conducted surveys of consumer and practitioner views on the practice and experiments to gauge product placement's impact on brand awareness, attitudes, and purchase intent (Wiles & Danielova, 2009). American adolescents spend roughly six hours per day engaging in some form of media (Arnett, 2010).

While YouTube pioneered the prospect of watching shows and user-generated content on the web, advertising on YouTube is widespread and influenced by traditional media such as network broadcasting and televisions. The short video clip pattern can also be found in mainstream media websites with major companies responding to YouTube through creating their own accounts to communicate and advertise to their audiences. Katrina Wu (2016) conducted a study on in-content advertising and categorized them into three forms which include: direct sponsorship where the influencer partners with the sponsor to create videos, affiliated links where the content creator gets a commission resulting from purchases attributable to the influencer, and free product sampling where products are sent to the influencers for free to be featured in a video. Each example of the

three forms of YouTube in-video advertising is present across virtually all genres of video, including fashion, culinary, gaming, and comedy.

Understandably, a growing number of academic studies are examining the reaction of digital audiences to paid endorsements and other types of digital advertising. Monge-Benito et al. (2020) conducted a study to analyze response to the growing number of product endorsements present in YouTube videos published under the username "Verdeliss" by Estefania Unzu Ripoll, Spain's most popular YouTube influencer on the topic of childcare and parenthood. Data was gathered employing a self-administered survey of 949 Verdeliss followers and revealed that participants focused on their evaluations of source attributes indicate that Unzu Ripoll's YouTube fans tend to purchase products that she endorses based on her characteristics surrounding likeability and expertise, with the overall social influence she exerts on their purchase intent. Results suggest that YouTubers should frame the product endorsements contained in their videos in ways that avoid distancing their followers, given that followers who are not agitated by brand endorsements are more willing to purchase endorsed products than the others. Given the widespread cultural impact of fashion and beauty products – these sectors are the most invested and interested in marking via channels such as YouTube (Schwemmer & Ziewiecki, 2018). Many social media influencers are specializing in fashion and beauty products receive more offers to promote products and gratify to a wider audience, the digitalized market demonstrates the power of relevancy and precision targeting yet abundantly saturated.

Tajfel's (1978) Social Identity theory is used for this study as a conceptual framework. According to the theory, the audience first evaluates the influencer's content

along with the elements of likeability and expertise, with the overall influence on their

audiences and several social media platforms. YouTube provides a favorable opportunity

for advertisers through its customization, profiling, and tracking users' activities based on

demographics and even locations (Zeng et al., 2009). YouTube became one of the front

runners among other social media sites with the potential to convey and fulfill the shoes

of the distributor and producer of video content based on each user's preference and

needs. Accordingly, Rusmevichientong and Williamson (2006) underlined the increase in

online search activities has spurred the growth of search-based advertising services

offered by search engines, such as Google and Yahoo. These services enable companies,

such as YouTube, to promote their products to consumers based on their search queries.

When a consumer searches for one of the selected keywords, search engines then display

the ads associated with the highest bids for that keyword on the search result page. The

algorithm prioritizes keywords based on a prefix order, through the process of sorting

keywords in descending order of profit-to-cost ratio or "bang-per-buck" with little to no

recognition of social and ethical issues raised, such as advertising of harmful products to

unintended audiences and excessive repetition of the advertisement.

In-stream Ads on YouTube

Another major category of YouTube advertising is in-stream ads. They are similar

to traditional media advertising. Extensive literature revealed several types of in-stream

video advertisement that may appear during or next to the content within the platform

which consists of: skippable video ads, non-skippable video ads, bumper ads, and overlay

ads (Google, n.d.). Advertisements are important advertising tools to attract consumers.

Product placement opportunities and advertising messages are produced under the control of a brand. Bumper adverts offer a different monetization space for YouTube that may also be relevant to the video, such as products featured in it. Viewers may see a teaser for the display card for a few seconds where they can also click the icon on the top right corner of the video to browse and explore the advertisers (YouTube Help, n.d). Corporations use YouTube in many areas, from raising brand awareness to community engagement. They are encouraged to create their own YouTube channels to advertise, few studies have focused on YouTube and examine attitudes toward display advertisements. Sabuncuoğlu-İnanç et al. (2020) conducted a study on YouTube and its aspects affecting viewers' attitudes. Their results suggest that a high entertainment factor has a positive reaction. The irritation level or frequency of exposure have negative responses considering that irritation is one of the antecedent factors contributing to the evaluations of advertising values and attitudes towards digital advertisements. Further results indicated that if these advertisements had a high entertainment factor, they induced a positive reaction, the same goes with informativeness. Although, as the quantity of ad messages rises, the attitude towards the advertising worsens (Haghirian & Madlberger, 2005).

Furthermore, providing a better understanding of which young adults manage their perceptions of YouTube content and digital advertising. With the rise of social media platforms, YouTube become more relevant to marketers. The new audience may identify himself or herself with influencers and the community along with the categorized brands. The comparison process is based upon two principles: the audience is active in their selection of the media they consume and the interactivity of the media allows users

to provide content in response to a source or communication partner (Ha & James, 1998). In-stream ads are often personalized and relevant to the content that the users view. However, the increasing quantity of online advertisements within YouTube is raising questions about their actual marketing effectiveness (Semerádová & Weinlich, 2021). Although previous research has proven that video ads generate better results in terms of the number of reactions, reach, and profitability overall (Semerádová & Weinlich, 2019). YouTube provides a research opportunity to consider that the field of advertisements is evolving and may lead to unintended consequences.

Advertising and Social Effects during the COVID-19 pandemic

The trend among adolescents using digital media platforms establishes an untapped market for advertisers. The Internet is a multifaceted medium, offering various layers of complexity and interactivity. Compared to a reader of newspapers and magazines, the Internet gives more control to users for watching the content of their choice (Bezjian-Avery et al., 1998). Opeodu and Gbadebo (2017) indicated that an advertisement on various media platforms plays a vital role in influencing the consumer's choices. Hence, the nomination of selecting a media platform for advertisements is key for the promotion of products and services (Singh, 2012). Advertisements are a widely accepted source of information among the consumers as compared to other sources, and hence, media mix decisions are crucial for advertisers (Shrivastava, 2014).

The current COVID-19 pandemic has created a global environment that is likely to increase media consumption and a disruption to daily routines and constraints to outdoor activities (Holmes et al., 2020). The social restriction may deprive individuals of

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social support and encourage them to stay in-door, which may, in turn, increase media consumption through the increased reliance on video conferencing for education, social media sites for social interactions as well as increased exposure to advertising. Park et al. (2021) found that advertisements that use authenticity appeals during the pandemic could reduce consumers' perceived uncertainty and generate positive consumer evaluations during a threatening situation like COVID-19. The audiences' motivation to lower their uncertainty underlies the effect of COVID-19 threat on their evaluation of authentic messages, this highlights their perceptibility to the online advertising and emphasize on-brand responses to COVID-19 through their pursuit for profit through the online repetitive nature and lack of concern for their audiences (Sobande, 2020). Simultaneously, elevated rates of stress and negative affect due to the pandemic and social isolation may also contribute to increased risk and negatively impact symptoms such as eating disorders (Rodgers et al., 2020). With the vast amounts of information stored online, the issues concerning personal privacy, impact on self-identity as young adults through their transition to maturity became difficult to control as to how individual privacy is being violated and its social effect on the users themselves. Especially during the pandemic, where the increased reliance on technology becomes a hindrance to many people while corporations are profiting through targeted advertising. Exploring the escalating front of private information collection as it becomes prominent, this research aims to explore the social effects of YouTube advertising messages on young adults during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Research Questions

Therefore, the study goal was to understand young adults' perceptions and relationships of YouTube influencers, content, and their attitudes toward associating brands. The literature review reveals motivations related to social identity and attitudes toward in-stream and in-content ads, also the effect of YouTube advertising value on the relationships between attitude and purchase intention. Using previous research, U&G theory emphasizes that motives, attitudes, and behaviors related to media consumption will vary by individual. Extensive literature reveals that media behavior is purposive, goal-directed, and motivated. The audience tends to select media content to satisfy their needs and to mediate social exchange such as interpersonal interaction for selection, attention, and use. There are motivational factors that influence information sharing and viewing of content based on the Uses and Gratification model through Social Identity theory. Factors influencing perception and association with brand attitudes and self-identity. Following the above, the study proposes the following RQ:

Research Question One (RQ1): How does social identity relate to seeking certain content of YouTube?

Previous research revealed purchase intentions were more favorably influenced by attractive salespersons' messages. The findings indicate that salespersons with a standard accent or dialect were perceived more favorably and created higher purchase intentions (DeShields et al., 1996). Emphasized the receiver's perception of a given piece of information can be different depending on the information sender. Prior research

called this phenomenon a "source effect" and has shown that it can influence consumers'

perceived credibility for a particular piece of information and their purchase intention.

The system of YouTube advertisements establishes YouTube influencers as a core factor

of advertisement attributes affecting purchase intention and attitudes. Monge-Benito et al.

(2020) conducted a study to analyze response to the growing number of product

endorsements and suggest that YouTube influencers are viewed and praised upon through

their characteristics surrounding likeability and expertise. Thus, influencers are able to

exert their social influence onto their audiences' purchase intent and suggest that

YouTubers should frame the product endorsements contained in their videos in ways that

avoid distancing their followers, given that followers who are not agitated by brand

endorsements are more willing to purchase. In this study, we focus on young adults,

resulting in the following RQ:

Research Question Two (RQ2): How does social identity affect attitudes toward in-
content advertisement?

The next research question examines the prevalence of social identity and

attitudes toward in-stream ads on YouTube. Previous research found that display adverts

offer a different monetization space for YouTube that may also be relevant to the video,

such as products featured in it. Rusmevichientong and Williamson (2006) underlined the

increase in online search activities has spurred the growth of search-based advertising

services offered by search engines, such as Google and Yahoo. Accordingly, in-stream

ads are often personalized and do not directly influence advertising value but have an

indirect influence upon social identity and attitudes. Hence, we are examining the relationship at the following RQ:

Research Question Three (RQ3): How does social identity affect attitudes toward in-stream advertisement?

Previous studies have identified positive relationships between purchase intention and attitudes toward the brand. Wiles and Danielova (2009) have conducted a study on consumer and practitioner views on the practice and experiments to gauge product placement's impact on brand awareness, attitudes, and purchase intent. Likewise, Sabuncuoğlu-İnanç et al. (2020) yield a more comprehensive understanding through their study on YouTube which demonstrates that a high entertainment factor has a positive reaction. While the irritation level or frequency of exposure have negative responses considering that irritation is one of the antecedent factors contributing to the evaluations of advertising values and attitudes towards digital advertisements. Hence, if there is an excessive quantity of ad messages, the attitude towards the advertising worsens. Suggesting that YouTube should frame the product endorsements contained in their videos in ways that avoid distancing their followers, given that followers who are not agitated by brand endorsements are more willing to purchase. Therefore, we considered the following RQ for our paper:

Research Question Four (RQ4): How does attitudes toward the brand affect purchase intention?

The current COVID-19 pandemic has created a global environment that deprives individuals of social support and self-isolation. As a disruption to daily routines and heavy restrictions on outdoor activities, there is an increase in media consumption through the extended reliance on social media sites for social interactions as well as increased exposure to advertising. Simultaneously, elevated rates of stress and negative affect due to the pandemic and social isolation may also contribute to risk and symptoms such as eating disorders (Rodgers et al., 2020). The issues concerning personal privacy and impact on self-identity as young adults through their transition to maturity became difficult to control due to the ever-increasing amount of personal information being collected and stored online, individual privacy is being violated which may have social effects on the users themselves. Especially during the pandemic, where the increased reliance on technology becomes a hindrance to many people while corporations are profiting through targeted advertising. This study aims to examine the social effects of advertising messages during the COVID-19 pandemic. Accordingly, we considered the following RQ:

Research Question Five (RQ5): What are the social effects of advertising messages during the COVID-19 pandemic?

CHAPTER III - METHODS

Overview

This study seeks to explore YouTube viewers' experiences with content creators and advertisements. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with young adults who were frequent YouTube users. The qualitative interview was considered as a suitable method for this study, as it provides the necessary information about events and processes of daily activities within the YouTube platform that are difficult to observe and record with other methods (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). Participants were asked regarding their habits and consumption patterns in relation to online advertisements and viewed content on YouTube. The interviews were formatted in a way that encouraged two-way communication. Thus, the individual interview was selected as it brings forth personal experiences and information with how each individual relates to the topic of this study and gives adequate time to provide their opinion regarding the subject (Freeman & Mathison, 2009). Both the interviewer and the participants were able to ask questions, which allowed for a more comprehensive discussion. Thus, the participants may feel more comfortable expanding on their experiences and opinions reflecting their time spent on YouTube and other online platforms.

Participants

The study sample consists of 15 participants. The population includes anyone 18 and 30 who are YouTube users. This paper used a snowball sampling method to recruit participants through online forums and social media sites. The online interviews were recorded through note-taking with additional audio-recorded through consent for further

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notetaking. All participants were involved in documenting their online activities and

YouTube usage through a questionnaire and an informed consent form prior to the

commencement of the study. See Table 1 for full detail of the sample.

Table 1

Participants Profile

Participants	Gender	Age	Amount of time spent on YouTube
Participant 1	Male	23	7 to 8 hours per day
Participant 2	Male	20	4 hours per day
Participant 3	Male	22	1 - 2 hours per day
Participant 4	Male	23	3 - 4 hours per day
Participant 5	Female	23	1 – 2 hours per day
Participant 6	Male	22	1 hour per day
Participant 7	Male	24	5 hours per day
Participant 8	Male	22	5 hours per day
Participant 9	Male	22	3 – 5 hours per day
Participant 10	Female	24	4 hours per day
Participant 11	Female	25	7 hours per day

Table 1 (continued).

Participant 12	Male	24	3 – 4 hours per day
Participant 13	Male	18	3 hours per day
Participant 14	Female	20	6 hours per day
Participant 15	Female	24	3 – 4 hours per day

Procedures

This study sought to gain an insight into the participants' basic knowledge of online advertising and exposure to the Internet; participants were asked how much they know and experience online advertising and their online media usage. This also functions as an introduction to the topic for the interviews, considering research on Internet advertising literacy suggests that individuals are less skilled at identifying advertising on social media platforms than on television and radio (Fogg, 2002). As the final stage in the research design was feeding back the results to the participants. The collection of their understandings and experiences regarding YouTube and online advertising strategies are relevant when considering the relationship between the viewers and the online platform.

The study utilized online interviews through Zoom. After receiving IRB approval, participants were informed that they are taking part in a research study regarding YouTube content and advertising, and they were asked a series of questions regarding their online activities. The semi-structured interviews aim to provide flexibility to the participants, adjusting the order of the questions and remaining as open and adaptable as possible to their nature, and ensuring that the same general areas of information are

collected. Each interview lasted for approximately half an hour. After concluding the

interviews, each participant was compensated and assured that the information collected

will only be used for the purposes of this study. In addition, participants were informed

that he/she can request that their interview not be used any time before data finalization.

If this request is made, the data from the interview will be destroyed and not used in the

study and all of our 15 participants did not make this request. Each participant received

contact information for the researcher, the faculty supervisor, and the IRB. The data

collected from the interviews will remain anonymous as this poses minimal risk to the

research participants. If possible, a translated copy of the report will be made available to

the participants.

Interview Questions

      Interviews were structured and conducted by the main author, in addition the list

of questions was adapted based upon the participants' answers to maintain flexibility and

allow the participants to convey their experiences in detail. These questions and topics

included perceptions surrounding advertisements and the content on YouTube (e.g. How

do you feel about content and advertisements on YouTube?); social identity and

motivations on seeking content to explore RQ1 (e.g. How do you feel when you search

for content? And what role does it play on your daily activities?). Follow-up with

questions about opinions surrounding YouTube for RQ2 (e.g. How do you feel about

content on YouTube?); opinions surrounding influencers (e.g. How do you feel about

YouTube influencers?); the role of influencers (e.g. What do influencers do when he/she

wants to engage with their fans?).

Furthermore, the interviews asked questions regarding the participants' awareness of advertisement for RQ3 (e.g. How important is the viewers' knowledge with sponsored content?); effects of advertisement for RQ2, RQ3, and RQ4 (e.g. How does the content influence your behavior and purchase intentions?). The question was followed up by asking participants about their experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic for RQ5 (e.g. Has the current pandemic changed how you view media? If so, how?). Please see Appendix 1 for the semi-structured questions. These questions were situated around the context of understanding the audiences' perceptions and comprehension about these topics as they were perceived to affect their self-identity and attitudes.

Afterward, the collected data which included the audio-recorded interviews, additional notes, and any relevant information regarding the participants' experiences on YouTube was entered into computer files. This study utilized inductive thematic analysis through examining qualitative data which involves connecting any emerging categories and themes. The main author was trained in qualitative research methods, reading the interview transcripts to identify common themes and assign categories that correlate to the RQs. This study aims to explore and deepen our understanding of the different influences of YouTube advertising on young adults and their association with self-identity and attitudes towards the brand

CHAPTER IV – RESULTS

General Use of YouTube

At the beginning of the interview, participants were asked to talk about their use

of YouTube, in general. This acts as a methodological scope for understanding the

detailed comprehension of the participants' experience with YouTube and its community

through identifying their content preferences and their interactions with YouTube

influencers and other viewers. The answers revealed that the preferred activity on the

internet among the participants was relaxing entertainment, habitual pass time, and

exhibiting an act of escapism to an extent. In general, participants view advertising as a

form of media content that has little to no relevance to them. However, their engagement

with advertisements on YouTube varies. Many participants described specific

advertisements and endorsements they encountered. For example, Participant 1 stated his

experience regarding relationship between YouTube advertisement and the content:

"If I'm watching a video game related channel and I see a game related ad that I'm more,

like, check it out then... if I was watching a cooking show and then that same game ad

came up because then I wouldn't be interested in that at that moment."

Seeking Certain Content of YouTube

The first research question (RQ1) explored the impact of social identity on

content seeking behaviors on YouTube. As highlighted by previous frameworks, there

are motivational factors that influence information sharing and viewing of content based

on the Uses and Gratification model. During the interviews, participants reported that

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they look for content based on individualistic preferences on a wide variety of genres and social identity plays a role in the findings of YouTube content.

The interview revealed that the preferred content on YouTube among the participants was comedy. This was followed by documentaries and informative content which provide valuable and useful information to the audience. Participants select YouTube content to satisfy their needs and desires with social and psychological dispositions that mediate that behavior, and the media compete with other forms of communication such as interpersonal interaction for selection, attention, and use. When asked about their preference of YouTube content, Participant 1 stated that:

"I usually don't stick to one Youtuber that long because my tastes in content change and I don't always want to watch the same thing. So, by the time it gets back to being interested in, whatever that's Youtuber covered with its content…   I probably don't actually care about them that much anymore. But, I definitely prefer niche Youtubers because I feel in that way, I'm at least supporting their hobby and/ or their passion."

For some, the recommended feed is the first thing that they see on the site. Many of the participants searched content through their recommended page as an easy way to keep in contact with their subscriptions and their preferred content. Participant 14 explained their YouTube routine:

"Uh, mostly I used YouTube for cooking recipes, uhm, for music and for working out. I just get stuff recommended to me and uhm. And yeah, like uh, if I watch a specific, uhm,

music video from a specific artist, uh, more of their songs would come recommended to me. And that's what I would watch."

Prior research noted entertainment and information seeking as vital components for using digital media such as the social phenomenon of gamers as YouTube influencers whose successes are based upon their humor and social identity through their implementation of direct language and personalization to attract new followers and familiarize with their co-existing audience (Lozano-Blasco et al., 2021). Participant 6 noted that YouTube content can also be informational and entertaining at the same time:

"Uh, so I watch all kinds of different content. I usually.. it's a lot of nerdy stuff. I watch a lot of Youtubers who play games, a lot of animation, I like... I like to watch a lot of rap battles. Those could be pretty funny and I also watch, you know, educational things I like. Set things like V Sauce for example, it can give.. you know, teach you something and still you have fun while it does, you know."

Due to YouTube's social networking capabilities, viewers can share opinions about the content through comments and rating systems and are able to share the content itself through sharing and sending the video links to family and friends. This allows users to move seamlessly between traditional mass communication activity of watching mediated content and interpersonal connection activities between the user and the content creators. When asked regarding their self-identity through the YouTube community, Participant 1 expressed that:

"Well, I would say it's less about the Youtuber themselves and more like the fandom around him that that actually feels like I'm part of. Because these people can come and go, but having the Youtuber to discuss with my friends is more important than they actually are."

Participant 15 also noted their experiences being both a content creator and a dedicated viewer:

"I would love to hear these more stories about like the Youtubers that I watch about like their success how they started because I guess that's the hardest part of any content creators to start because - you.. very often you don't feel motivated enough to keep going because you just don't get enough people who watching you, like, people who support you. So, I wish there was a way to learn more about people you look up to about their stories."

Attitudes toward YouTube In-Content Advertisement

The second research question (RQ2) investigated YouTube users' attitude toward in-content advertisements. There were some concerns about the prevalence of YouTube ads, but others see creators as experts and developed relatively positive attitude toward the ads. Many participants noted that they noticed the in-content advertisement when it interrupts their engagement with the video content, citing some advertisements that suddenly popped up during or after the video which they expressed their annoyance

towards. Consequently, this led to avoidance strategies such as skipping that section of the video. Participant 8 noted their perspectives on YouTube sponsorship:

"I mean, I don't really like watching or like.. I'll typically skip through the.. well, a lot of Youtubers like having ads kind of placed in, not part of the video. Like it is in the video as a whole, but it's kind of like a separate thing that's not really integrated. With the video I guess, so to speak, I typically skip those, but there are like sponsored videos where they're just talking about a product that was sent to them or whatever. Obviously, I watched the whole video on those."

Participants also acknowledged that interactions between the audience and the influencers could heavily influence their perception of a given piece of information. Participant 10 were asked questions regarding their attitude towards sponsorship and involvement towards the YouTube community:

"Most of them have sponsorships or they sell merch. I would like to get some of their merchants, so that was pretty cool… and it's kind of annoying at times 'cause it feels like I get it, they have to make money, but the same times I feel like it's disingenuous, like, I'm OK, fine and whatever."

The interviews also revealed that YouTubers are viewed as experts of their respective fields and their characteristics surrounding likeability and familiarity. This

could have positive impact on user responses to in-content ads. For example, Participant 11 mentioned his online purchase endorsed by the YouTube group, Sideman:

"Yeah, 'cause I like the Sideman. They always wear their merchandise in every video. Some of their videos they don't. But, like, most of the videos they would wear it and, uh, it looked nice. And so, I got some for me and my sister and it was good, the quality was good. I have as like a memory. "Oh, look at them, this is their merch.""

Attitudes toward YouTube In-Stream Advertisement

The third research question (RQ3) investigated YouTube users' attitude toward in-stream advertisements. Most participants indicated that they used YouTube on a daily basis and noticed many in-stream advertisements that emerge before watching a video, they cited advertisements that were often not skippable. They acknowledged that in-stream advertisements are mandatory for the platform, but they often expressed their annoyance towards the repetitive nature of digital advertising. Participant 2 noted their frustration regarding the in-stream advertisements on YouTube:

"And I'm like, OK, I'm like - I have to wake up and press this skip ad button and I know, I know if it's a 15 second ad, the worst ad in existence is the one. I forgot what it was advertising, but it's with BTS band. BTS is singing they were sing - it's not advertising BTS I was like *hums music*. Oh man, me and my brother both knew like me and my brother both talked continually about how much we hate these like if you get double 15 second unskippable ads, you wanna freaking break your phone in half."

Other participants indicated that they feel indifferent towards in-stream advertisements, because they kept YouTube as a free streaming service. For example, Participant 13 expressed their recent experiences on personalization:

"I don't mind as much, but other people might be a little creeped out about it. For example, I just recently bought a pair of Vans that they are a pair high tops and they feel really comfortable, but uhm, after I bought those Vans, I kept getting some Vans ads for a while. Which kind of doesn't make sense to me because I already bought my pair of vans, I'm not going to go want to buy more unless I need to. So yeah, I just personally feel like it's a waste of time to do that, but obviously the people are going to feel it's an invasion of privacy. I don't quite feel that way."

The majority of participants expressed considerable concerns regarding the persistent exposure to the same advertisements which led them to avoid in-stream advertisements completely through different strategies. When asked about YouTube advertisements, participant 1 noted:

"I mostly use AdBlock. It doesn't run into them as often, but there have been times where I do watch those ads and I feel it's fine - because at the end of the day, that's how these content creators get their money. So even if I'm not interested, as long - as short enough, like 15 seconds. Then I don't mind I can just do whatever else."

Strategies described by the participants include the convergence of advertisement within the content of the video and the increasing popularity of AdBlock use. Several browser extensions have been developed to disable network requests for undesirable content such as online advertisements. Although, participant 6 noted that some of implementations of sponsorship can be successful:

"Honestly, it feels like there's two kinds of YouTubers when it comes to sponsorships. There are the ones that just do it because it's a paycheck. Then, there are the ones that make it an actual like significant part of their video. Uh, you most of the time, like I don't really pay attention to sponsorships. Once a YouTuber starts advertising, I just kind of skip it, you know, but sometimes there are Youtubers. I will see who will create some kind of comedy effect out of... out of the sponsorship. Like the other day I found myself, actually, watching through a sponsorship segment of a Mr. Beast video because his friend, Chandler, was in the back.. playing basketball and trying to make a half-court shot... so that way his sister can win $10,000. So, he tells him if you… "I'm gonna start the sponsorship segment and start talking about this thing that I'm advertising and if within the time if you can hit the half-court shot, I'll give your sister $10,000". And so I found myself wanting to watch the sponsorship segment just because I wanted to see if he could actually hit the shot, you know."

Relationship between Brand Attitude and Purchase Intention

The fourth research question (RQ4) concerned relationship between brand attitude and purchase intention. Participants' responses varied significantly depending on

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individual experiences. Some participants noted negative experiences when exposed to the same advertisements at a high volume, while others noted positive experiences when the advertisement is implemented within the video content. By the same token, many participants indicated that they noticed the increased frequency of product placement, citing some advertisements that interrupt the flow of their content. Generally, participants expressed that the majority of advertisements and sponsorships were not relevant to them. Participant 9 noted their experiences when asked about sponsorships within the content creators that they watch:

"There were a few sponsorships related to food, but it wasn't really what I cared about when it came to that… there was one sponsorship called Niezen, which was for kitchen knives, but I don't need kitchen knives. There was another one called Crowd Cow. It was just for like sustainable beef, but I didn't really care about that either."

While a handful of participants admitted that they have purchased products through sponsorship and that these products facilitate and act as memorabilia that remind them of the content creators. Participants 13 were asked regarding their positive experiences with sponsorship:

"Well, I like what Pyrocynical does, which is another YouTuber [that I] watch, sponsorships tend to give YouTubers in what's called an ad read and they just read what's on the.. They just read the script that the.. what the sponsors give them, and they just shout out the product. Pyrocynical does not do that, obviously has to stay somewhat

closely to the ad read but um He makes his own skits to where even though it's a sponsorship, you still it's he still makes it funny and he still makes it entertaining to watch. And yeah, his sponsorships are the only ones I don't skip because I actually enjoy watching them."

Advertising messages during the COVID-19 Pandemic

The last research question (RQ5) explored YouTube users' perception of advertisements during the COVID-19 pandemic. The current COVID-19 pandemic has created a global environment that deprives individuals of social support and self-isolation (Holmes et al., 2020). As a disruption to daily routines and heavy restrictions on outdoor activities, the interviews revealed an increase in media consumption and that advertisements that use authenticity appeals during the pandemic could reduce consumers' perceived uncertainty and the participants expressed positive reactions during a threatening situation like COVID-19. Participant 6 discussed his experience of unemployment during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic:

"So, like there were two times where COVID, I would say did impact my use of the Internet. That was one when COVID first became, you know, a worldwide problem and I worked at Disneyland and Disneyland closed, and so I was out of the job, and so I was unemployed. And because I was unemployed, I had more time at home and so I spent a lot more time on the Internet because I wasn't working… maybe month or two, when I first lost my job, yes it had an impact on my use of the Internet, but other than that, no, not really."

Participant 3 also noticed an increased media consumption especially when his classes were moved online, and he was using YouTube as a source of information throughout the COVID-19 pandemic:

"I've used it more for information. 'm learning stuff which you know, it kind of came in tandem with, uh, the teachers uploading on YouTube. Uh, for classes. I think yeah, I do use it more because you're stuck at home more than before. Uh, it's like pre-pandemic. So, I think it would be quite normal to be watching more."

Also, participant 9 specifically mentioned a change in interests as he became invested in the YouTube culinary channels:

"Well, I didn't use to care about food at all, but then I started getting into these food Youtubers and now I actually want to consider getting into cooking. So I'd say that changed me. There were a few sponsorships related to food, but it wasn't really what I cared about when it came to that."

This highlights the audiences' perceptibility to the online advertising and emphasizes on brand responses to COVID-19 through their pursuit for a profit with the online repetitive nature and lack of concern for their audiences (Sobande, 2020). The issues concerning personal privacy, impact on self-identity as young adults through their transition to maturity became difficult to control as to how individual privacy is being

violated and its social effect on the users themselves. The interviews present that the

participants were aware of personalized ads but were not personally bothered by them.

Although, they expressed that it affects other individuals more negatively. Participant 13

were asked questions regarding his experiences of personalized advertisements:

"For example, I just recently bought a pair of Vans that they are a pair high tops and they

feel really comfortable, but, Uhm, after I bought those Vans I kept getting some Vans ads

for a while. Which kind of doesn't make sense to me because I already bought my pair of

vans, I'm not going to go want to buy more unless I need to. So yeah, I just personally

feel like it's a waste of time to do that, but obviously the people are going to feel it's an

invasion of privacy. I don't quite feel that way."

CHAPTER V – CONCLUSION

Discussion

The study was designed to explore the relationship between individuals' self-identity and their attitudes toward advertising messages on YouTube, a social website that has over a billion unique users every month (Goodrow, 2021). Personal interviews were conducted with young adults who are frequent YouTube users. The questions explored their experiences with content creators and advertisements. Previous findings suggested influences of social identity through factors such as family, friends, surrounding environments, and backgrounds which shape the perceptions of reality. Advertising influences this process through niche marketing that reinforce certain aspects of social groups in order to categorize consumers as members of the targeted group, this can be done through repetition and maintaining an interpersonal connection with the audiences (Fogg, 2002). In addition, there are numerous factors affecting motivation for using YouTube which were divided among self-expression, involvement, social interaction, and information seeking. This is especially important to examine as the COVID-19 pandemic has created a global environment that is likely to increase media consumption and a disruption to daily routines and constraints to outdoor activities (Holmes et al., 2020), which leads to extended exposure to digital advertisements and sponsorships by YouTube influencers.

Social Identity as Motivation for Content Consumption

Results suggested that social identity was used as motivation for content decisions on YouTube. Participants viewed YouTube videos for the purposes of sensation seeking,

convenient entertainment, and information seeking. Social phenomenon of gamers as YouTube influencers (Lozano-Blasco et al., 2021) were highlighted in the results in their effectiveness of reaching a wide range of audiences, especially through their implementation of direct language and personalization to maintain and attract new audiences. Direct languages such as "guys", "bros" were used to reinforce the digital community of followers and stimulate their self-esteem within that group and feeling of belonging, to generate an emotional bond and community commitment. This would support prior research that suggests the use of personalization and direct language is an essential strategy in enticing and obtaining new followers, with appealing for interaction and referencing one's followers in videos (Pereira et al., 2018). In addition, participants revealed that sponsorship can be implemented successfully if the content creator incorporates the advertisement within their content. This is evident when a good sum of the participants admitted that they have purchased products that were sponsored by YouTube influencers. These products facilitate and act as memorabilia that remind the participants of the influencers.

Rubin and Rubin (1985) suggested that people use media to satisfy their interpersonal needs and use interpersonal communication to satisfy media-related needs. The results suggest that the process of selection and viewing YouTube videos is achieved through similar factors identified in prior studies for watching television (Rubin, 1983), whereas the Internet is both an interpersonal and mass communication medium. There are motivational factors that influence viewing and post-viewing discussion of content based on the Uses and Gratification model, participants noted that they used YouTube content and influencers as conversational topics when bonding with friends and family. This is

also consistent with previous research that highlights that media behavior is purposive, goal-directed, and motivated (Rubin et al., 2003). Many researchers have recognized the effects of television on social aspects of individuals and their habits (Haridakis, 2002), and that media content serves as topics for post-viewing discussion (Levy & Windahl, 1984). The unrestricted and on-demand nature of YouTube allows advertisers to be flexible and established a foundation for immediate two-way communication between the consumers and the advertisers through its unique social resource provided by YouTube to reinforce the during-viewing interaction and post-viewing social discussions. As highlighted by participant 1:

"I'd say I'd like most of them, but I don't feel that much of a connection to the certain YouTube that I do with the content that they make. Well, I would say it's less about the Youtuber themselves and more like the fandom around him that that actually feels like I'm part of. Because these people can come and go, but having the Youtuber to discuss with my friends is more important than they actually are."

In addition, the outcomes of this study suggest that online socialization is a means of sharing the content with others and supports Tajfel's cognitive aspects of Social Identity theory regarding the social uses of television and the Internet derived through group memberships that form the midst of our identity-forming process. Socially active individuals may be influenced to watch YouTube videos for intentions of social interaction and relaxing entertainment or utilize YouTube as an approach for sharing online interests with family members and friends with whom they have existing social

attachments, especially during a pandemic where mandatory isolation led to the increased reliance on indoor activities.

For digital marketers, the findings validate the importance of building online community, especially through interpersonal interactions with influencers. The need for social interaction could heavily influence YouTube users' content selection and their attitude toward advertising messages.

Attitudes on In-Content and In-Stream Advertisement

Regarding the viewer's perspectives of online advertising, the results show that the viewers were impartial or negative towards advertising on the Internet. Previous research on exposure to online advertising (Rusmevichientong & Williamson, 2006) is primarily negative, although there is a lack of contribution to the increased risk and impact on symptoms such as eating disorders as suggested by prior research within this study (Rodgers et al., 2020). Additionally, the study indicates that frequent viewers developed different avoidance and integrated habits to cope with unwanted advertising on the Internet. Some participants also stated how they sometimes had difficulties avoiding advertising on YouTube. They are annoyed by advertisements that appear frequently but understand that online advertisements constitute an important part of the Internet ecosystem and finance the content creators. For an instance, when asked about his opinion on YouTube sponsorship, Participant 9 said:

"Well, I don't like it, but it's probably a good thing for the content creators so they can make more money to continue making content. I'd say for a lot of people, YouTube is a

job. Of course, some people it's a more casual thing and they will put out a video every two months or something and they don't really make money off it, but for the people who are putting out a video every day, yeah, it's definitely a job."

This study highlights the audiences' perceptibility to online advertising and emphasizes on brand responses to COVID-19 through their pursuit for a profit with the online repetitive nature and lack of concern for their audiences (Sobande, 2020). The Internet has influenced the power structure of the marketplace and has transferred market power from the producers to the customers through interconnectivity in a straight and personalized way through video ads (Semerádová & Weinlich, 2019). The issues concerning personal privacy, the increased frequency of exposure to advertisements may become difficult to control as to how individual privacy is being violated and its social effect on the users themselves. Especially during the pandemic, where the increased reliance on technology becomes a hindrance to many people while corporations are profiting through targeted advertising. The interviews present that the participants were aware of personalized ads but were not personally bothered by them. Although, they expressed that it affects other individuals more compared to themselves. The results were also consistent with prior research that analyzed responses to the growing number of product endorsements and suggested that YouTube influencers are viewed and praised upon through their characteristics surrounding likeability and expertise. Therefore, influencers were able to exert their social influence on their audiences' purchase intent by framing the product endorsements contained in their videos (Monge-Benito et al., 2020). The influencer may wear their merchandise in videos, and they present themselves in a

way to entice potential buyers. While only a handful of participants admitted that they have purchased products through sponsorship and that these products facilitate and act as memorabilia that remind them of the content creators which reinforced Tajfel's Social Identity model. They also highlight the perpetuation of brand awareness, attitudes, and purchase intent which was consistent with the previous study (Wiles & Dinelova, 2009).

The Effects during COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has created a different environment and a research opportunity to examine the effects of social isolation onto digital media such as YouTube and its users. As a disruption to daily routines and heavy restrictions on outdoor activities, this study confirmed the increase in media consumption and many advertisement implementations of authenticity and familiarity appeal that reduce consumers' perceived uncertainties and participants expressed positive reactions during a threatening situation. This ensures that YouTube sponsored videos are effective in driving valuable reach and engagement through the targeted demographics of audiences. As highlighted by previous studies, digital media offers convenient entertainment, but the increased reliance on technology becomes a hindrance to many people while corporations are profiting through targeted advertising. Participants expressed their concerns about the personalization of advertisements but when given the option, they stated that they prefer to have personalized advertisements over-generalized advertisements. Participant 15 noted:

"Actually, maybe I would keep the personalized apps. I'm sorry, I think sometimes it's useful if you're looking for something specific, but you're not sure then. I actually like seeing personalized ads because I think one day it might help me, but it's just in my everyday life."

In addition, there are many factors affecting motivation for using YouTube during the pandemic. Some of the participants noted their experience on unemployment and an increased reliance on the media for both sources of information regarding the COVID-19 pandemic and entertainment. They raised issues concerning personal privacy that became difficult to control as to how individual privacy is being violated and expressed that they were aware of the personalized advertisements but did not find them bothersome. The results show that perceived personalization of advertisement has a higher positive response, through perceived relevance, compared to the traditional advertisement that is generalized within a specific demographic.

Limitations and Future Research

Future research should explore the broader range of social and theoretical characteristics that may predict the varying forms of YouTube use. As highlighted by this study, a measure of self-esteem might help determine the level of media exposure and determine the predictability of those individuals' tendency to watch and share YouTube content. In addition, further examination of gender and age differences may provide independent outcomes and determine the impact of demographic deviations. As a result of online interviews, the lack of accessibility to respondents and the selection of

questions may not provide a robust set of emerging themes. Numerous research opportunities to consider that mass communication and interpersonal communication are interlinked and may lead to longer exposure to the medium. This study highlights the relationship between individuals' self-identity and their attitudes towards advertising messages on YouTube and sharing YouTube content where advertisements are seamlessly assimilated into the content, unlike traditional commercials. It is important to overview the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the mandatory social isolation which led to increased media consumption as the audience is being wired into a world where we are more reliant on the Internet while being bombarded by advertisements.

Conclusion

This paper reveals the relationship between individuals' self-identity and their perspective towards advertisements on YouTube. While examining the association between the audience's attitude and purchase intention towards digital advertisements. This paper employed Social Identity theory and the Uses and Gratification model to examine the effects of user-generated content of influencers and the relationship of brand awareness. The prevalence of online socialization, personalization, and the aspect of convenient entertainment significantly contribute to the overall time spent and sharing of the content found on YouTube, especially during a pandemic where mandatory isolation led to the increased reliance on indoor activities. Whereas the feeling of a collective community is important. The outcomes of this study suggest that online socialization is a means of sharing the content with others and supports Tajfel's cognitive aspects of Social Identity theory regarding the social uses of television and the Internet derived through

group memberships that form the midst of our identity-forming process. The study also indicates that frequent viewers developed different avoidance and integrated habits to cope with unwanted advertising on the Internet. Strategies described by the participants through the increasing popularity of AdBlock web extensions or completely skipping the sponsorship sections of videos. Whereas advertisements were mentioned to be entertaining and participants would continue to watch ads if the content of the ads were enjoyable and memorable. Specific brands were also outlined in relation to some of the advertisements that were brought up during the interviews, the practice to disclose endorsement and advertisement relationships in order to foster clarity between the content creators and their audiences.

APPENDIX A – INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1.   How do you spend your time online?

2.   How often do you use YouTube on a typical day?

3.   How do you feel about content and advertisements on YouTube? Why?

4.   How do you search for content?

5.   Have the advertisements that you see on YouTube influenced you to use/

        purchase their services? If so, how?

6.   What role does it play on your daily activities?

7.   How do you feel about YouTube influencers?

8.   How do you feel about being part of a YouTube community?

9.   What do influencers do when he/she wants to engage with their fans?

10.   How important is the viewers' knowledge with sponsored content and why?

11.   From your personal experience, how does the content influence your behavior and

        purchase intentions?

12.   Has the current pandemic changed how you view media? If so, how?

APPENDIX B – IRB Approval Letter

Office *of*
Research Integrity

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NOTICE OF INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD ACTION

The project below has been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board in accordance with Federal Drug Administration regulations (21 CFR 26, 111), Department of Health and Human Services regulations (45 CFR Part 46), and University Policy to ensure:

- The risks to subjects are minimized and reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits.
- The selection of subjects is equitable.
- Informed consent is adequate and appropriately documented.
- Where appropriate, the research plan makes adequate provisions for monitoring the data collected to ensure the safety of the subjects.
- Where appropriate, there are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of all data.
- Appropriate additional safeguards have been included to protect vulnerable subjects.
- Any unanticipated, serious, or continuing problems encountered involving risks to subjects must be reported immediately. Problems should be reported to ORI via the Incident submission on InfoEd IRB.
- The period of approval is twelve months. An application for renewal must be submitted for projects exceeding twelve months.

PROTOCOL NUMBER: 21-262
PROJECT TITLE: Influences of YouTube Advertising on Young Adults: A Social Identity Perspective
SCHOOL/PROGRAM   Child & Family Studies
RESEARCHERS: PI: Nathakorn Srithong
                      Investigators: Xue, Fei~Srithong, Nathakorn~
IRB COMMITTEE ACTION: Approved
CATEGORY: Expedited Category
PERIOD OF APPROVAL: 03-Feb-2022 to 02-Feb-2023

Donald Sacco

Donald Sacco, Ph.D.
Institutional Review Board Chairperson

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