

Internet Advertising: Perceptions of the Users

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ABSTRACT

The tremendous growth of global network, Internet penetration, created an undeniably profitable avenue for marketers and business owners to get reduced cost and high advertising revenue. A large number of advertisements were published by marketers on its way today, followed by negative effects on users. This research studies today's Internet advertisements and negative effects of online advertisements on Web users. The paper aims to analyse online factors influencing users' perception and attitude towards advertising on the Internet. The online survey was conducted among 150 active Internet users from public universities in India. The findings reveal the dramatical growth of online advertisements over the past 4–5 years. Most of the respondents find online advertisements distractive/intrusive, confirming that almost all privacy issues on the Internet and social sites are due to Internet advertising. Also, the study establishes that the attitude of users towards Internet advertisements is non-positive, especially pop-ups, video ads and retargeted advertisements are the most disturbing ones among online advertisements. The research concluded that the overall perception of Internet users about online advertisements is neutral, suggesting that it should be improved.

Keywords: Internet Advertising, Negative Effects, Attitude Towards Advertising, Disturbance, Retargeted Ads

INTRODUCTION

Today the Internet has become part and parcel of the lives of people. Computer-mediated communication, based on modern information and communication technologies through the Internet network, has revolutionised the way people stay in touch and the way companies conduct business. The global system of interconnected computer networks—Internet penetration—increased tremendously in such a way that things for which a whole day was spent can now be performed in a few clicks, thanks to the power of the Internet (Gates 1995; Holtz 1998; Otte 1994; Wilson 1999).

The strategic importance of the Internet and its significant growth over the years have given another avenue for marketers and businesses to advertise their products to the world. The popularity of online advertising (e-marketing) has been remarkably increased in the past 15 years. E-marketing is one of the latest and emerging tools in the marketing world. Marketers who invest over 10% of their

budgets on measurement are three times more likely to beat their sales targets by 25% or more. It includes the creative use of the Internet technology including the use of various multimedia, graphics, texts, etc., with different languages to create catchy advertisements, forms and e-shops where the product can be viewed, promoted and sold (Hooda & Aggarwal, 2012). The methods and techniques used for online marketing include email, social media, display advertising, search engine optimization and so on. The objective of online advertising is to reach potential customers through the channels where they spend time in reading, searching, shopping or socialising online.

Online Advertisement

Gradually advertisers have shifted their budgets away from traditional media (e.g., TV, newspapers and magazines) towards online advertising. According to the investigation of DBM, Adobe ad spend is set to grow from \$83 billion

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in 2017 to over \$129 billion by 2021. Internet offers several benefits such as it increases efficiency, reduces cost and provides more flexibility in a global medium. The rise of the smartphone has only accelerated this shift, as smartphones have fundamentally changed the way people consume content. The average smartphone conversion rates are up by 64% and mobile advertising accounts for \$37 billion of the \$73 billion total ad spend (51%) as per Digital Marketing Depot (2017). The role of online advertising is essential at present.

Today browsing of users on the Internet is a frequent activity; exposure of users to online advertisements is equally frequent as well, which is likely to be the most important revenue source for such a site. Advertising can promote positive values, behaviours and attitudes such as sociability, affection, generosity, patriotism, ecumenism, personal enrichment and security (Holbrook, 1987). In contrast, advertisement is also a factor that perturbs browsing processes that visitors engaged in. It has been criticised to unintended consequences that relate to its emphasis on a range of negative behaviours including materialism, cynicism, irrationality, selfishness, anxiety, social competitiveness, sexual preoccupation, powerlessness and a loss of self-respect (Pollay, 1987).

The number of advertisements has been increased in the past few years. According to the 2016 Ad Blocking Report, 91% of people claim that ads are more intrusive today than before, 87% report that there are more ads in general than 2–3 years ago and 79% feel like they are being tracked by retargeted ads. For example, Gibbs (2008) reported examples of usability in news websites due to advertising, such as causing the user to lose his place and to perceive the text below the advert as an entirely new story or users struggle to find the ‘close’ button to get rid of a pop-up advert.

Consumer’s attitude towards online advertisements changed; the effectiveness of ads has been cracked. It is one of the main challenges of today’s advertisers. The advertising in websites is important for the advertising industry, but it also brings a negative attitude to Internet users (Cho & Cheon, 2004). As the number of advertisements increased to double in the past few years, people voluntarily or intrusively come across the adverts quite often when they access websites (Chatterjee, 2008). Some studies suggest that the effectiveness of

online advertisements is under question, indicating that the attitude of people towards them is not as positive as expected. Hence, the purpose of this research is to investigate the latest changes in the relationship of Internet users towards online advertisements and the factors that induce these changes coupled with the consequences that trouble users.

Effects of Different Online Advertising Formats

Simultaneously with the fast growth of popularity of online adverts, it continues to be plagued by fraud and viability issues, as well as low creative standards, less effectiveness, etc. Some people report that Internet advertising has some fundamental problems that are difficult to fix. The issues that it creates are low click-through rates (0.1% on display ads), widespread click fraud and low viability (only half of the ads served online actually seen by users). Concerns have also been voiced about ‘the creepy’ nature of retargeting, irritating pop-ups and the prevalent use of ad-blocking software. The increasing arguments against Internet privacy concerns that are realised very sensitive issues by the majority of online customers are also basically related to the advertising of marketers (Chung & Paynter, 2002).

Various varieties of online advertisements are available which distract people from their ultimate purpose of being online. Relatedly, according to PageFair Report (2016), 298 million people take the help of Adblock browsers on their smartphones. However, according to Chapman (1998), online advertising should preferably be part of an online media strategy that should include clear goals, objectives and target markets with a separate online marketing budget to make it more effective.

The most well-known online advertising formats are as follows:

Display Advertisements

It is evolved from a basic form of banner adverts, combining visual advertisements that appear on third-party websites (floating banners, pop-up ads, videos, flash ads, etc.). Despite the dominance of banner advertisements in Internet advertising, their effectiveness remains debatable. Benway and Lane (1998) demonstrated that

Web users tend to avoid looking at such advertisements even when they are designed to be attention-grabbing—a phenomenon referred to as ‘banner blindness’. Internet users are now so used to seeing them that they have developed a sort of banner blindness and ignore them. 54% of the users do not click banner ads because they do not trust them (Banner sack). In 2013, Nielsen in his ‘Trust in Advertising’ study reported that online banner ads are one of the least trusted forms of advertising among consumers falling even behind traditional ads like in the newspapers or magazines. This is caused by many reasons, mainly a lack of credibility, does not meet expectations, amateur ad design, plain old ‘banner blindness’.

Coupled with banner ads, pop-up ads have taken a lot of pressure lately because people believe that they are irritable. A statistical research report from last spring claimed that pop-ups are 50% more likely to be noticed than banners, but also 100% more likely to be considered disturbing and intrusive. Pop-ups are one of the major factors that irritate visitors and drive them away from websites. The brand’s reputation is easily affected by multiple pop-ups scattered all over websites. Excessively large ones that occupy the whole page can make them close their browsers altogether (Shocker!) pop-up ads—the advertising that is most resented by consumers with a 73% disapproval rating (why people block ads).

Social Media Advertisements

It is a marketing arena that is not only efficient but effective for advertisers. Very similar to display ads, social media ads can be anything from a simple banner or image to an autoplay video. In spite of the fact that social media marketing is indispensable and that social media advertising budgets are increasing year after year (2018, 23%), the criticism of advertisements is also increasing (CMO Survey). Particularly, when users come across with some product adverts on Facebook or Instagram, these ads irritate them. Even, because of the vast number of advertisements on Facebook, most Internet users lost interest in this social media website claiming that it has become only advertisements. 45% of the American users used ad blockers in 2017, and thus the utilisation of ad-blocking software has been popularised. In China, 54% of the users are blocking most of the ads; it is 18% in Japan out of which 67% of the marketers are using Facebook (Edison Research, 2017). Yet the recent Facebook crisis

of privacy issues was claimed by Cambridge Analytica that a famous social media website sold a vast amount of private information of users to third-party sites through the use of cookies.

Native Advertisements

Native advertisements are those sponsored listings at the end of blog posts that appear on your Facebook feeds and posted to other social media. Though there is not that much disapproval rating of these advertisements in statistical reports, this is also because almost half of the consumers have no idea what native advertisement is and about such consumers, and 51% of those consumers are sceptical. In a survey by Trusted Media Brands, 44% of the respondents called native advertisement a ‘less intrusive ad format’, and 27% quoted native’s ‘better user experience’ (Marketing Land).

Video Advertisements

There are several formats, types and content options in this advertisement, especially Youtube video ads received higher popularity. Despite the fact that 52% of the marketers believe that video is effective for brand awareness (though it is too expensive ad format; Wyzowl, 2016) and the traffic of video sharing by users increased (70% of users report that they have shared a brand’s video with a friend or on their social media channels; Wyzowl, 2016), there are several complaints as well on this advertisement. In the list of the most ad-dislike formats, pre-video ads (with and without skip) and autoplay video ads are on the highest rate after pop-ups (Fessenden, 2017). Most of the people do not watch video ads because they are too long or the video is discouraged because of low quality. 61% of the users report that they have been put off buying a product after watching a bad explainer video (marketing statistics; Wyzowl, 2016).

Retargeted Advertisements

Advertisements of the same product or service to the people who already know about it is one of the most frustrating and irritating adverts nowadays for Internet users (especially on Facebook, Google and Twitter). InSkin Media’s Consumer Survey found that the two main responses to a retargeted ad were annoyance and

anger. If adverts are shown five times, an ad becomes annoying and intrusive; when shown ten times anger becomes the dominant reaction. Based on the data, 55% of customers put off buying, 53% get irritated and only 10% buy while users see retargeted ads. Moreover, the most common complaints about retargeting are that it is 'creepy', creating concerns over the privacy of Internet users by collecting their personal data using cookies and others for its use.

Personal Email Advertisements

This is the easiest and cost-effective way for businesses to communicate with their customer individually. This form of interactive communication is becoming more popular and bringing higher revenue. However, it has also many disadvantages. Due to the huge number of emails by businesses, the consumer becomes annoyed and rather unsubscribe; 55% of the email users admit to hitting the spam button instead. A large number of emails sent several times in a week by online shopping companies are staying unopened and deleted directly without reading by consumers, without being clicked.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Moore and Rodgers (2005) research found that consumers do not trust the information collected by online advertisements on social networking sites. The results showed four antecedents of advertising avoidance in the online social networking environment: consumers believe that online social networking sites lack credibility and perceive that there is little policing of advertising claims in this medium; prior negative experiences or the expectation of negative experiences due to word of mouth; the advertising message is not of interest to the receiver of the message; consumers are sceptical of the claims made by the advertisement or these claims are not appropriate to the media environment. In these cases, consumers are likely to ignore the message and potentially disregard other messages in this medium.

An increasing number of people are using the Internet, and in many cases they are unaware of the fact that information is being collected from them as reported by Chung and Paynter (2002) in their research 'Privacy issues in the Internet'. People are concerned about privacy and security issues due to the widespread use of cookies and

Web bugs at the websites by net advertising companies that can obtain personal information such as buying habits, email and other personal data that are combined into a mailing list for direct marketing purposes or to sell to third parties. The study revealed that 66% of the 140 studied websites in New Zealand collected some personal data from consumers. Among these personal details, 43% notified the purpose of collection and 38% provided notice by way of a comprehensive privacy statement. This implies that websites ignored consumer's privacy without having any notification of the collection purposes.

The same results were observed by O'Brien and Torres (2012) who investigated Facebook users' perceptions of online privacy as well as the role of trust in an online social networking environment. The study reveals that over half of the Facebook users have a high level of privacy awareness; only one-quarter of the users trust Facebook; 14.1% of the Facebook users have read the privacy policy. Over three-quarters of the users (78.3%) have changed their Facebook settings. Based on a survey of MIT students and the statistical analysis of Facebook data from MIT, Harvard, NYU and the University of Oklahoma privacy on Facebook, the following three principal factors are determined: users disclose too much, Facebook does not take adequate steps to protect user privacy and third parties are actively seeking out end-user information using Facebook.

According to Vratonjic's (2013) investigation, the vulnerabilities of online advertising systems identified how an adversary can exploit the ad system to generate profit for itself, and thus a number of techniques are deployed aiming at tracking and profiling users' digital footprints, i.e., their behaviour in the digital world (botnet of compromised wireless routers, click fraud (various types), malvertising—one of the fastest growing security threats on the Web—is a class of online ads that attempt to infect an ad viewer's computer, adware—any software that displays advertisements without users' permission, a novel type of ad fraud—the inflight modifications of ad traffic); economics of online ads indicate that the problem of ISPs becoming strategic participants in the online advertising business either by cooperating with ad networks to improve ad targeting (i.e., sharing users' private information in exchange for a share of the ad revenue) or by non-cooperatively diverting a fraction of the ad revenue from ad networks (i.e., implementing

inflight modification of ad traffic); for the privacy of online advertising, especially the location-privacy threat that arises due to the use of shared public IP addresses (because location-targeted ads are very effective), an experiment was conducted based on users' traffic to Google services, collected from deployed hotspots that observed the large scale of the threat: even at a moderately visited hotspot, Google could geolocate almost all of the users who access its services.

Moore, Moore, Shanahan, Horky, and Mack (2015) developed a new construct, creepy marketing, and discussed the impact of online personalised marketing on consumers and how the online marketing has become annoying today. Online marketing is creating an unsettling feeling as well as consumers are frustrated and annoyed by the techniques such as the use of GPS technology as well as advances in behavioural tracking software that easily identifies, tracks and intercepts our activities; online personalized marketing uses real-time information and behaviour to reach the consumer at the time in which they are engaged in need satisfying activities; voluntarily or involuntarily provided information is needed from consumers for personalization; advertisements may make the consumer feel fearful, uncertain or uncomfortable. 87% of the respondents called it creepy marketing according to the following tactics: invasive actions, consumer discomfort and violation of social norms. The findings for annoying marketing predominately are classified into the following three categories: aggressive tactics (persistent selling measures and pressurising the customer to make a purchase), repetition and obnoxious (garish, loud or low-quality ads), representing 79% of the responses.

Advertising repetition has been seen to have negative consequences on both known and unknown brands (Campbell, Keller, Mick, & Hoyer, 2003). In particular, the repetition of advertising attributed to an unfamiliar brand showed decreased effectiveness; when the same advertising was attributed to a known, familiar brand, repeat wearsout was postponed. Negative thoughts about tactic inappropriateness were seen to arise with repetition, particularly for an ad for an unfamiliar brand, driving, in part, the decreases in repetition effectiveness.

Aggressive consequences of Internet advertisement are seemingly captured by hard selling techniques (e.g., Chu,

Gerstner, & Hess, 1995). Chu et al. define 'hard-sell' as a 'situation in which to a majority of the consumers the annoyance is greater than the expected benefit' and provide examples of aggressive advertisement techniques such as bait and switch selling, manipulative presentations, creating a false sense of urgency and overstating the product's merits. High-pressure tactics have been criticized for a multitude of reasons; in particular, the average consumer feels that these tactics cause discomfort with the purchase experience.

The findings of Wang, Ampiah, Xu, and Wang (2014) reveal that social media users perceive online ads, especially pop-up ads as intrusive and ineffective. The users of social media have a negative attitude towards pop-up ads, mainly because of its obstructive nature. Also, the study establishes that pop-up ads have little impact on the purchase behaviour of social media users since a negative attitude has been formed towards pop-up ads. In other words, the products/services advertised through pop-up ads do not appeal to these users. Based on the result obtained from the study, it can be concluded that pop-up ads are not effective in influencing the purchase behaviour of social media users.

McCoy, Everard, Polak, and Galletta (2004) predicted that users would adopt more negative behaviours when a site displays ads than when the website does not. Pop-up ads seem to be more intrusive than in-line ads, implying that users should not be interrupted from their online tasks to close the extraneous windows. Among all other types of online advertisements, pop-ups are considered to be the most annoying. Specifically, the operationalisation of disruption may include the time spent on tasks, the amount of information needed and also the level of memorisation and recall. Disruptive ads are considered to be more irritating than other types of advertisements because they demand more users' involvement in information processing.

The main results of the review that have been experimentally validated are about the effects of display advertising. According to Brajnik and Gabrielli (2010), along with the positive effects of display advertisements on websites such as increased chances of repeated visits to the website by users, more purchases, interest and comprehension of Web contents and reduced risk of abandonment, there are other issues as well: users will

have fewer chances to look at advertising and to elaborate it, they will be increasingly entangled into tunnel vision, they will slow down, they will struggle to accomplish what they wanted to and they will inevitably develop a more negative attitude towards the website. Users may develop negative attitudes towards websites hosting the adverts, leading to reduced visit duration, fewer visits, fewer referral chances and increased negative word of mouth.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND ANALYSIS

Objectives

The cognition and perception of Web users towards online advertisements in new media are different. Users are particularly frustrated by ads that obstruct information, like pop-up ads, because they are an unwanted interruption (Chan et al., 2004) and require more attention and effort. Users feel imposed upon because they have no choice but to act to remove the ad.

With this in mind, the present research work is carried out with the objectives to

- find out awareness/perception of users about online advertisements;
- identify the credibility and reliability of Internet advertisements;
- study the effect of online advertisements on Web users and their behaviour/attitude towards them;
- analyse the overall opinion of Web users on Internet advertisements.

Research Design

To meet the objectives of the study, the quantitative research method is adopted. A descriptive research design in the form of an online survey was conducted among 150 active Internet users in India. The study explores the influence of online advertisements on attitude-based measurements of Web users. For designing the

questionnaire, Google forms were used. The items used in measuring the effects of online adverts were coded on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5).

Sample

In this research, the students of different courses currently studying in several colleges of Hyderabad city, India, are considered as the sample of study. Students are considered appropriate for this type of study as they frequently interact with different websites and social media. The online survey was sent to 150 college students by email and through social media regarding present Internet advertisements and its effects on users. A survey questionnaire was prepared in English, consisting 20 questions and was divided into two sections. The structured questionnaire in Section A consisted the perception of users about online advertisements, and Section B was about effects of online advertisements on users and their attitudes towards them as well as socio-demographic variables such as age, gender, education and interactivity with the Internet had been scaled. Primary data were collected from the respondents during August and September 2018.

DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Demographic information of survey participants is presented in Table 1.

Out of the total number of respondents, 55% were male and 45% were female. The most active age group of students was 18–24 years (46%) followed by 25–34 years (44%). In terms of educational qualification, master students were in majority (48%). Bachelor students consist of 40% of the total respondents, followed by Ph.D. students (6%). As can be seen from the collected data, survey respondents frequently interact with the Internet. 36% of the students daily surf Internet for 3–4 hours and 27% for 5–6 hours in a day. Interestingly, 12% of the students interact whole day with the Internet.

Table 1: Respondent Profile

Demographics											
Age	No.	%	Gender	No.	%	Education	No.	%	Frequency of Internet Interaction	No.	%
18–24	70	46	Male	82	55	Secondary education	6	4	1–2 hours	27	18
25–34	66	44	Female	68	45				3–4 hours	55	36
35–44	12	8		61	40	Bachelor	61	40	5–6 hours	41	27
45–54	1	0.6		73	48	Master	73	48	Whole day on Internet	18	12
55–64	1	0.6		10	6	Ph.D.	10	6	Sometimes I check my accounts	9	6

Perception of Users About Online Advertisements

A respondent's perception of Internet advertisements plays an essential role in awareness and willingness to interact in consumption activities. The study is aimed to examine how many Internet users in India have the knowledge and awareness about today's online advertisements on various Internet sites.

Respondents find that they see more Internet

advertisements than before. Global Internet ad spending increased by marketers because the number of Internet advertisements has grown for the past 4–5 years. In this study, the five-point Likert scale was used to determine the respondent's responses. Fig. 1 presents a remarkable increase in Internet advertisements over the past 4–5 years. As shown in the figure, there seem online advertisements rapidly shoot up. 70% of the respondents confirmed that online advertisements increased in the past few years. 9% of the students persuaded that they are more than should be, and 8% replied by 'perhaps'. 6% and 4% replied by 'I didn't feel' and 'FALSE' respectively.

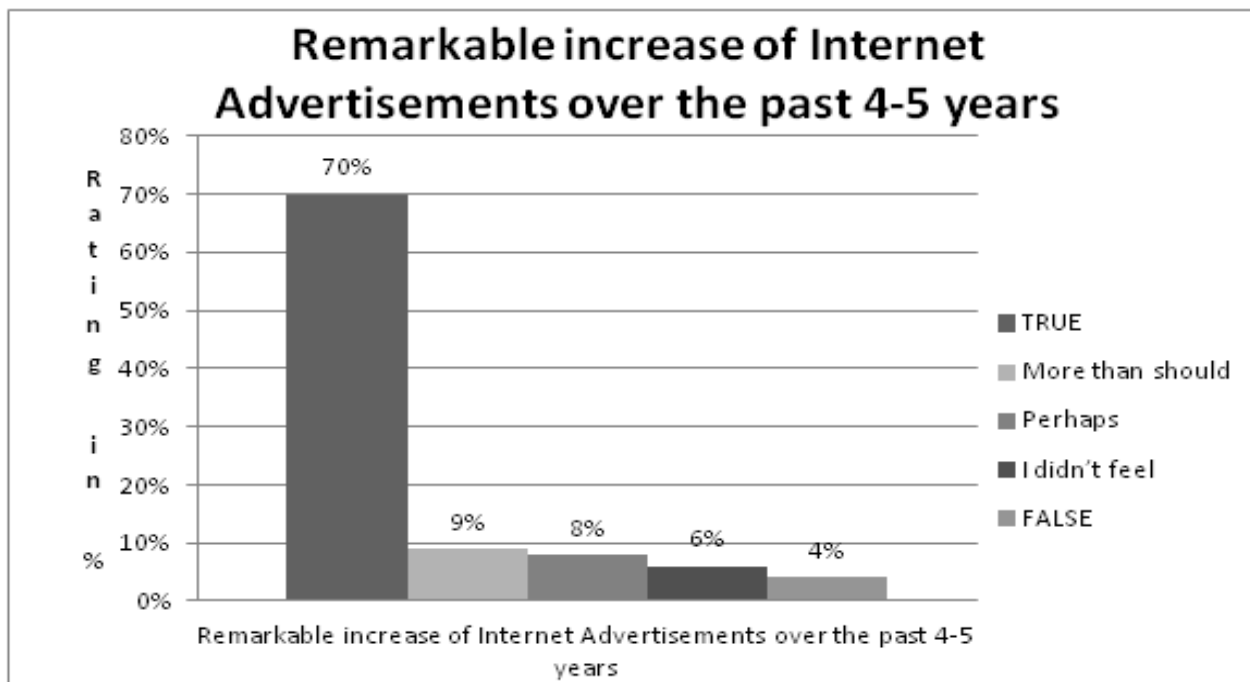


Fig. 1: Remarkable Increase of Online Advertisements Over the Past 4–5 Years

As social media is popular among Web users and marketer’s attention is drawn in advertising in social media platforms, examining student’s attention to online advertisements in social media websites is beneficial. The responses of respondents regarding which social media has the largest number of online ads are presented in

Fig. 2. It was found that nearly half of the respondents (46%) responded that Youtube uses a large number of online advertisements. Facebook is the second social media (39%) exploiting advertisements in its platforms as per users. Snapchat scored the least (1%) in this rating.

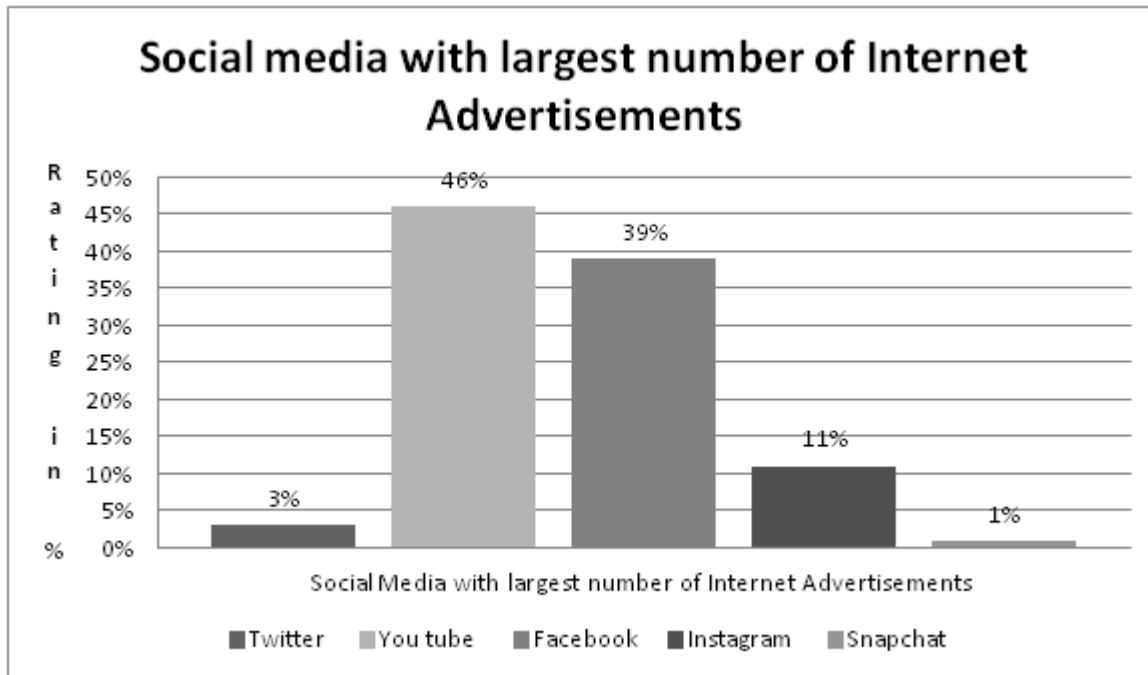


Fig. 2: Social Media with the Largest Number of Internet Advertisements

The perception of users about online advertisements is changed. The respondents were asked to indicate how much they agree. Online advertisements are intrusive nowadays. The interesting fact is that 67% of them assured that they are intrusive, with 10% reporting strongly agree with this. Taken together, to establish the credibility and reliability of Internet advertisements, the students were

questioned whether they agree that most of the privacy issues are due to online advertisements and we received a negative response. 39% of the respondents agreed with this statement, followed by 8% who strongly agree with this. 32% of them hesitated about this. The responses are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Opinion of Online Advertisements by Users

Variables	Strongly Agree		Agree		Maybe		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Nowadays online advertisements are more intrusive	15	10	101	67	24	16	8	5	2	1
Most of the privacy issues are due to online ads	13	8	59	39	49	32	18	12	11	7

The Attitude of Users Towards Online Advertisements

The important part of our research is to determine the effects of today's online advertisements on Internet users and how they react towards it. To know this, the researcher presented several most well-known types of Internet advertisements and their effects on users. The attitude of Internet users towards online advertisements has measured on the seven-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The five most well-known types of online advertisements are used as items: pop-ups, video ads, banner ads, text ads and email ads. The results are presented in Fig. 3. As evident from the

figure, it is clear that pop-up advertisements are the most unwanted among other online advertisements. Ninety-one respondents assured that they strongly dislike this online advertisement. Video advertisements are the second most unwilling online advertisements (67 Respondents) after pop-ups. For banner ads, 50 respondents strongly dislike them, 30 like them and 17 had a neutral response towards them. The interesting point here is that the simple text ads have a more positive attitude than negative to users. Forty-one respondents replied that they like text ads, 37 strongly dislike them and 27 had a neutral response towards them. The results for email advertisements are as follows: 66 dislike them, 45 had a neutral response and 21 strongly dislike them.

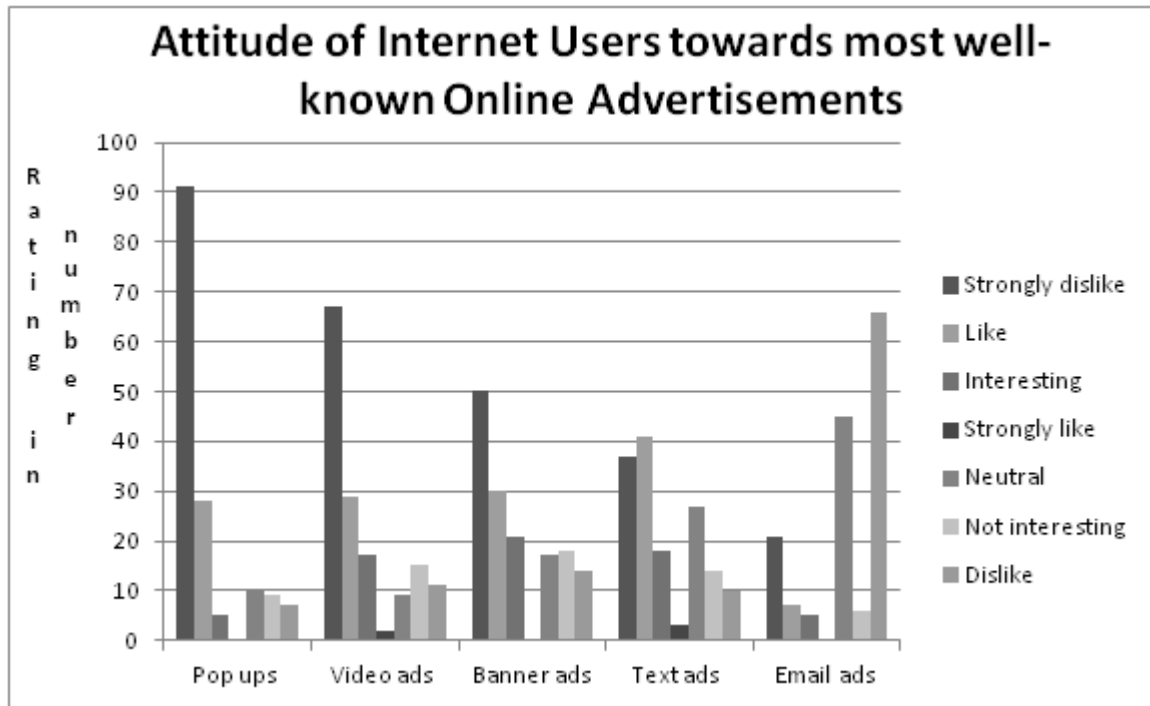


Fig. 3: Attitude of Internet Users Towards Most Well-Known Online Advertisements

In the last stage of measurements of users' attitude towards online advertisements, the reaction of respondent students was requested when they see retargeted advertisements. Unsurprisingly, the results were as expected. It is presented in Fig. 4. Equally half of the respondents feel

annoyed when they see the same advertisements seen in another site earlier. Only 4% of the respondents delighted and 8% excited from retargeted advertisements. 22% of the respondents had a neutral response, exhibiting neither a positive nor a negative attitude.

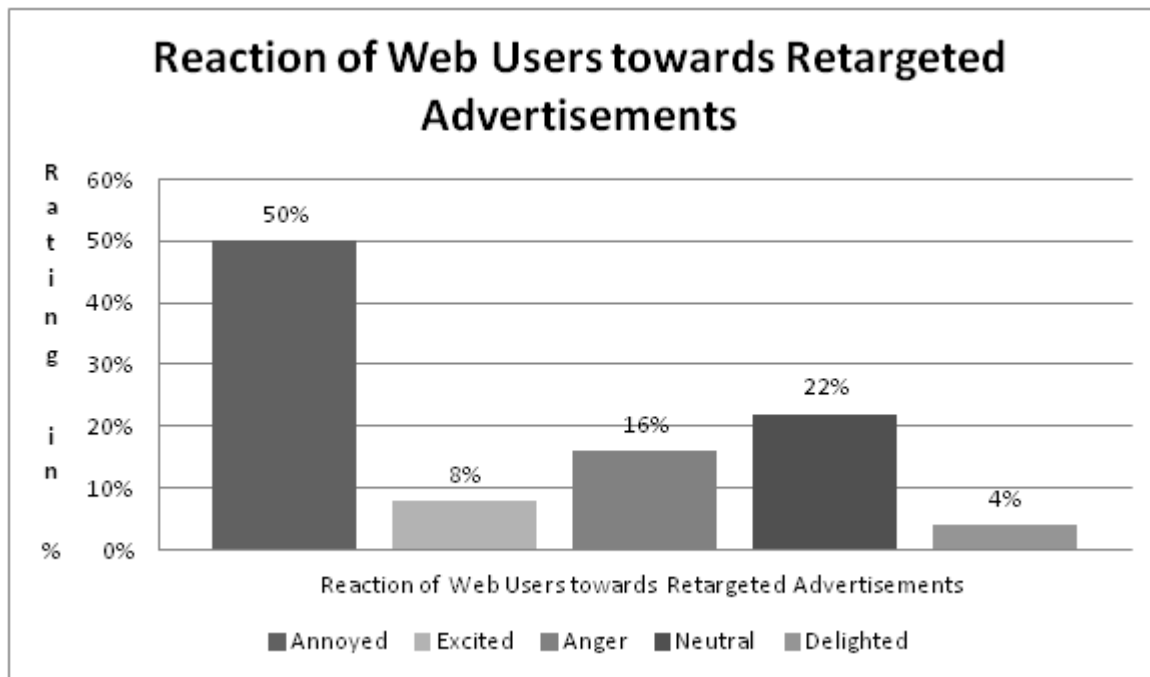


Fig. 4: The Reaction of Web Users Towards Retargeted Advertisements

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this research was critically assessed considering today's online advertisements in various websites and social media due to the increased number, disruption, intrusive character, interruption and distraction that negatively affect to the attitude as well as the behaviour of Web users. The study revealed that the number of Internet advertisements has grown up nowadays and relatedly negative side effects have also increased. According to the responses of the Internet users in India, most of the online advertisements are intrusive and disruptive always interrupting them from freely working online. Moreover, they confirmed the statement that the majority of the privacy issues are because of online advertisements. The study also found that pop-ups and video ads are the most undesirable ads for online advertisements. In particular, retargeted advertisements are causing irritation and annoyance among users. It is also important to note that Internet users are not strongly against online advertisements; they have a positive viewpoint as well as assurance that some of them are useful.

The study is concluded with the findings that the overall opinion of Internet users about online advertisements is

neutral, including that it should be improved, avoiding present negative effects. Advertisers should advertise on Internet websites with measurements, without interruption and repetition, obeying the rules of the privacy policy and respecting the choice of users.

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