

Saimaa University of Applied Sciences
Faculty of Business Administration, Lappeenranta
Degree Programme in International Business

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Incentivizing Advertisement Interaction within Mobile Applications

Thesis 2018

Abstract

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Incentivizing Advertisement Interaction within Mobile Applications, 48 pages, 1 appendix

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Marketing has infiltrated the mobile application market, using the increase in popularity and accessibility of smartphones and mobile media to reach consumers. This thesis explores the amount of interaction present between a user and application as well as determines if these users are able to identify the advertisements present within everyday app use.

An online survey is presented to Facebook users over a period of 30 days and quantitative results are analysed to draw a comparison to previous studies and theory provided by well-established data. The aim is to gauge which advertisements within mobile applications are being interacted with, and for what reasons.

The results draw some similarities to the aforementioned theory, and research questions are able to be explained. Many theories were further echoed by the results of the study, but one hypothesis in particular did not appear to be true and may require more time and closer study as the mobile marketing industry grows.

Key Words: mobile advertisements, ad incentives, ad interaction, social media apps, video apps, gaming apps

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background

There has been a significant switch to mobile media in the past decade. As of 2015, approximately fifty percent of adults own a smartphone worldwide. This has been predicted to grow to over eighty percent by 2020. Smartphones have become an integral part of daily life and entertainment. Therefore, is no surprise that marketing and advertisements have also penetrated the mobile market. (Planet of the Phones 2015.)

What makes this so intriguing is that, at a glance, it appears as though users are interacting with ads in their mobile apps more than on the Web, especially in gaming apps. Some initial theories suggest that this may be a psychological response or perhaps only attributed to the mobile nature of having the device on one's person for a significantly longer time than what is spent on a desktop or television. (Rand 2016.)

The mobile app industry has had many different implementation strategies for inserting ads within applications and giving users an incentive to interact with them. This is especially prominent in gaming apps. Sometimes ad placement is intrusive to the primary function of the app, which can result in the consumer either deleting the app, or in some cases paying to remove ads. There is also the phenomenon of app users voluntarily interacting with ads, such as watching a promotional video or even, so far as, downloading a third-party app.

1.2 Smartphone Users and Age Groups

Smartphone technology has advanced with the development of minimalizing components and stronger processors. Many smartphones contain similar power and usage capabilities as some notebook laptops, at a more compact size and mobility. As smartphones have become more common, they are being used by many different age groups, which was not as typical before. InsightExpress, a marketing research company, conducted a study in early 2009, which found that *84 percent of younger*

American Boomers (ages 45 to 54) and 79 percent of older American Boomers (ages 55 to 64) owned cell phones (Hasen 2012). They even inferred that mobile usage had surpassed laptops and personal computers among these age groups. Generation X and Y, ages ranging from 18 to 44, have become more reliant on mobile devices as their source of information and connection with the world.

The study also found that the younger age group tended to look at their phone when they were bored or to find new and interesting things. This may be related to the “instant gratification” need that seems to be more prevalent in this day and age. (Hasen 2012.)

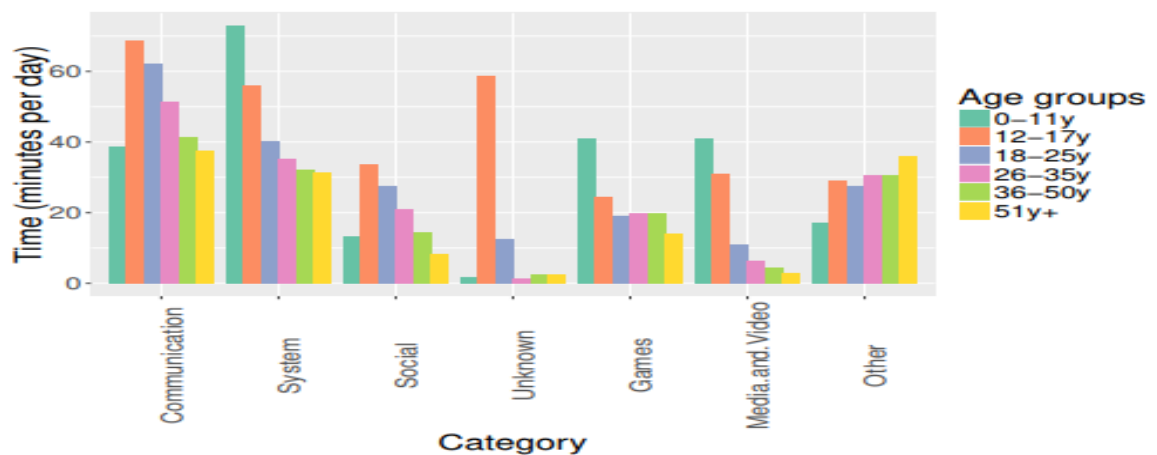


Figure 1. Media Type consumption and Age Group. (Andone et al. 2016. p. 3.)

A comparable study done in 2016, shown in figure one, presents these age group’s usage broken down over media type and consumption in minutes per day. Communication contributed to the overwhelming amount of usage per day for four out of the six age groups tested. Teenagers spent the most time on their phones at 194 minutes per day. The time spent steadily decreases as age increased with the lowest usage of 118 minutes for 51 years and above. (Andone, Ionut; Błaszkiwicz, Konrad; Eibes, Mark; Trendafilov, Boris; Montag, Christian; Markowetz, Alexander 2016, p. 4)

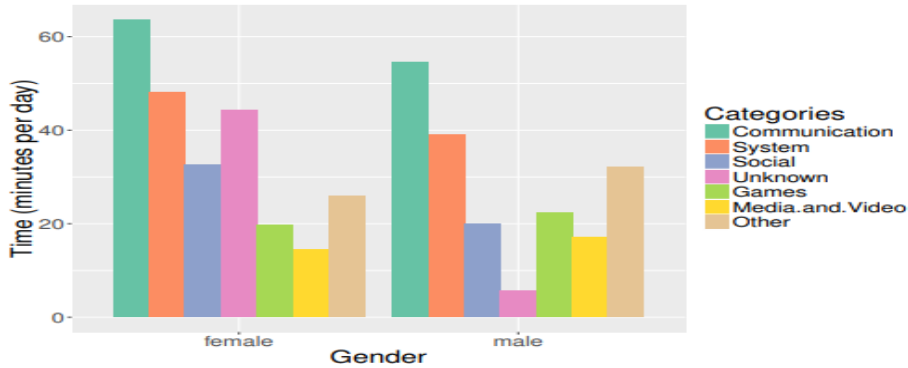


Figure 2. Smartphone Usage by Gender (Andone et al. 2016, p. 3)

As for the two genders' usage of smartphones, overall, females appear to be tuned into their phones more than their male counterparts, spending approximately 167 minutes per day compared to males at 154 minutes per day. However, males spend more time playing games or watching videos with their smartphones than females. (Andone et al. 2016. p. 3)

1.3 Advertisement Formats

Although mobile media is a newer medium of advertising, there are some commonly recognized ad formats seen within mobile advertising specifically:

Banner ads are advertisements which appear along the top or bottom of the screen, much alike a notification. They can popup or refresh ads at different intervals, or be static, depending on the app's ad preferences. These can be hyperlinked and interacted with by the user like most ad formats. (Google 2018.)

Interstitials are a larger format, usually taking up the majority of the user's screen, but appear during a transitional period so that their appearance does not seem as intrusive as a traditional app. They are most commonly used to create a "call-to-action" or to encourage downloads or "clicks" of the advertised item. (Google 2018.)

Video ads are advertisements shown to the user in video format rather than a picture or text alone. Some video ads can present themselves from an interaction with a previous banner or interstitial ad. It is also very common to see this type of an ad within video entertainment, such as on YouTube or Hulu. (Google 2018.)

Photo ads are commonly seen in social media apps. They are sponsored posts which contain a photo and adjoining text. They are simple and to the point, and are able to be hyperlinked to another page. (Facebook Business 2018a.)

Carousel ads allow marketers to show many images or a mix of images and videos as a continuous scroll, within one ad space. It also encourages interaction as the viewer can see there are other images available and must scroll through them to see more. These are commonly seen on social media apps as a type of promoted or sponsored post. (Facebook Business 2018a.)

Slideshow ads, similar to carousel ads, can showcase many images within the same promoted or sponsored post. What makes them differ is that they are self-transitioning and do not require a viewer's interaction to move forward to the next image. These types of ads provide movement and can catch a viewer's eye in a way a stationary photo might not. (Facebook Business 2018a.)

Messenger ads are a newer format which is specific to the Facebook mobile messenger app. They are similar to promoted posts which appear in a timeline or feed, but in this case, they appear in the user's messenger inbox. These are harder to look past by users as a mail inbox is a more personal environment. (Facebook Business 2018a.) Messenger ads will not be tested in this thesis as Facebook has removed the messenger function from the Facebook app and developed it as its own standalone app, which is classified as a messaging and communication app and not a social media one.

1.4 Research Objectives

For this topic, the main objective of the research is to understand what reasons are influencing app users to voluntarily watch advertisements. Supplementary research questions which can help to provide an answer to the main objective are as follows:

1. What are the most prominent methods seen in apps by users currently?
2. What incentives or rewards are worth watching ads?
3. Would users still interact with the same ad if the incentive was taken away?

4. Is there any truth behind users watching ads rather than skipping within video streaming apps in order to support content creators?

The first of the supplementary questions can be answered from existing published articles and studies. The remaining three are answered through a comparison of existing studies and a study created and conducted for this thesis paper specifically.

The aim of the research is to provide insight into the user's side of advertisements; to understand why they interact with some ads and not others. This information could be useful for advertisers to better understand the user and how to better present their ads within mobile applications to be successful.

1.5 Methodology

The research is quantitative, focusing on multiple choice answers and short-answers collected via an online survey. This method is chosen due to the large number of people who utilize mobile apps and to obtain the largest sample size possible. This style of a survey may also attract more people than interviews or long-answer questions as it is not as time consuming to fill-out and is fairly straight-forward.

An online survey was created and distributed via social media, targeting mobile app users. Distributing the survey through social media was chosen over other mediums such as paper or email, as it is much more accessible to a wider crowd and allows it to be shared to others beyond just one individual's contact list. It also appears that most social media usage is done via mobile app rather than desktop, which means those answering through social media most likely have experience with other apps.

The intended sampling method is a non-probability convenience sample. The target group is not restricted to a specific demographic or trait requirements, with the only real requirement being that the respondent use a smartphone, which is why both judgmental and quota sampling were not pursued as a viable method. Sequential sampling was also eliminated as separating sample groups or time frequencies is not a variable seeking to be measured.

Mobile ads from the three most prominent app groups, Gaming, Social Media, and Video Streaming, are analyzed in order to limit the topic and to avoid results becoming too broad. This method also helps to avoid apps within niche groups which could possibly skew results.

The initial idea is to ask the participants what types of apps they use on a daily basis and provide them with example situations in which they have to answer whether they have interacted, or would interact with an ad, and for what reason. After enough survey data has been collected, it is then compiled and analyzed through tools provided by *Google Forms*. This data analysis should provide evidence and answers to the proposed research questions and the ultimate objective.

1.6 Delimitations and Limitations

This thesis discusses only mobile applications within the research, meaning applications which can be downloaded for use on a smartphone or tablet. If the application also has a webpage or desktop app, only the mobile app is analyzed.

Desktop applications or webpages, even mobile webpages, are not be discussed as the advertisement environment in those cases is a different topic which would require different research and literature.

The literature used for theory and review may be limited in source variety; it appears that most up-to-date information about the topic is in webpages or articles. This may be due to the quickly evolving nature of the mobile environment. Book sources may be slightly behind current technology or marketing methods, which is why there may appear to be fewer physical literature sources.

A non-probability sampling group may also be a limitation as the data may not be truly representative of every smartphone user, and may also include an unintended bias in the results.

1.7 Thesis Structure

This thesis is structured to first provide a background and explanation of the current situation of mobile marketing and what is currently well known about it. Each app category has its own chapter to provide the framework for each app. These chapters include what the app is primarily used for, currently known advertising methods and other information pertinent to that specific application type. In the fifth chapter, the research method is described and survey question examples are presented. In the final chapter, before the conclusions are drawn, the data from the survey is presented and analyzed to provide possible answers or explanations to the research questions and objectives.

2 Gaming Apps

Many gaming applications rely on ad revenue for some portion of their profits, especially as users have become accustomed to free-to-play apps and are less willing to pay to download a game. A free-to-play app cannot truly be free if the company wishes to be profitable. Therefore, they must utilize whatever ad formats at their disposal in hopes that user interaction will bring in income. (Kaszor 2012.)

Gaming apps have an interesting approach to advertisements that would probably not be successful in other types of apps. Much of the advertisements seen in mobile games provide a reward for interacting with the ad. The most common types of ad format seen in gaming apps appear to be interstitial, video, and a hybrid of the two.

A study done by Kiip in 2015 showed that this unusually high level of ad interaction is due to the users' desire to get ahead faster or gain more resources within the game. This is even more prominent when the reward offered for ad interaction is something that would otherwise cost money. This implies that users are more willing to watch ads or send invites to friends rather than to part with their personal funds. (Koetsier 2016.)

Gaming app advertisements seem to target an "instant gratification" need by introducing ways to gain access to items or in-game currency, such as gems or coins,

instantly by watching an ad or paying real money. This is especially prevalent when these items are usually either time or achievement locked, requiring the user to play for a certain amount of time or doing a certain action to obtain, or are not accessible at all outside of advertisements or payment.

2.1 Sponsored Videos

One of the most commonly seen ads within a game app are sponsored videos. These are of interstitial format, presented after completing or losing a level or during another transitional moment within the game. Many apps offer a reward for watching videos and in some cases users can opt to watch these videos whenever they want in order to obtain the reward offered. An example of this can be seen from the game *Angry Birds 2* below.



Figure 3. Reward Ad (Spina 2017)

Angry Birds and other puzzle games offer users a “solution” to the issue of running out of attempts or to bypass a time limit implemented within the game. Another classic example of this is the popular game *Candy Crush*, which implements both sponsored video ad rewards and rewards from the next category.

2.2 Social Media Shares and Likes

Having users watch a sponsored video is not the only method that is implemented within gaming apps. Some other common methods are, giving the player rewards for sharing or liking a page on social media, or to invite a given number of friends to the game.

This method of advertising usually presents itself as interstitial, appearing only at non-intrusive times or as a natural progression. This may be to avoid the user feeling bombarded or harassed into the social media interaction which may lead to negative social media interactions.

These types of ads appear to be deliberately implemented in some gaming apps as part of the game; something that everyone must do to progress through the game. *Candy Crush*, a puzzle game which requires players to complete a puzzle in a set number of “moves” or turns, uses this method to encourage users to share or invite their friends to the game. By inviting or sharing on social media, users can gain extra chances or “power-up” items which allow for easier passing of the game, which can alternatively be bought with money. This strategy seems to have worked in the publisher’s favor as even in 2017 one in 23 Facebook users, or 93 million people, were active players of *Candy Crush*. (Digital Eye Media 2017.)

3 Social Media Apps

Social media usage has made a significant switch to mobile use as more users interact via their mobile devices than on traditional computers. A study done by Facebook boasts that *1 of every 5 minutes people in the US spend on mobile is on Facebook or Instagram* (Facebook Business 2018b). This is a significant amount of time when compared to the results shown in figure two; according to these two studies, females would spend about 33 minutes per day and males 31 on the two social media sites.

Figure 2 shown below shows a study finalized in 2015, which exemplifies the overwhelming use of smartphone apps over other methods of social media access. This percentage has only increased from 2013 to 2015. (Sterling 2016.)

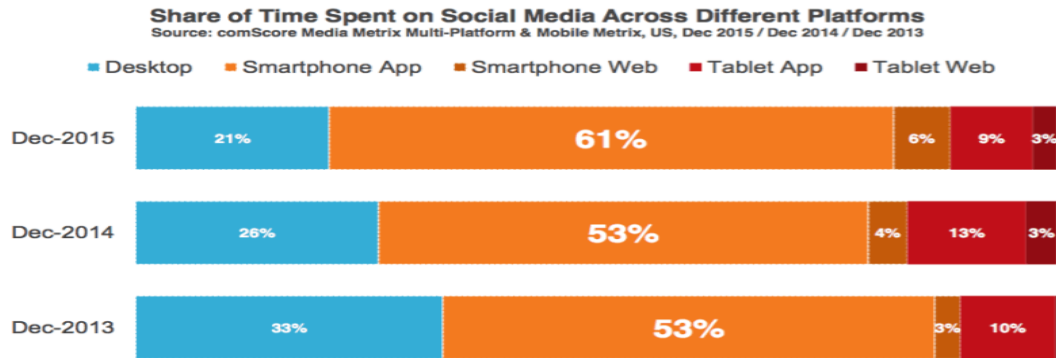


Figure 4. Social Media Usage by Platform. (Sterling 2016.)

With the absence of a “side bar” and limited screen space on mobile devices compared to their webpage counterparts, the most prominent methods of mobile advertising in social media is “sponsored” content or posts. These are integrated within a user’s feed as if it is a post from a friend or the user’s followed people. At first glance, some of these advertisements may not even faze a user as being an advertisement due to this type of placement.

Advertisements in social media apps are most commonly seen as “sponsored”, “promoted”, or “pinned” posts. This language can make the advertisements seem less intrusive. The sponsored content can present itself through many different formats, not limited to just the single photo format. This type of advertisement is primarily based on the users interests or interaction history. Following links or searching for items can influence the ads which will be presented to the user. Many social media apps have the ability to share this information across partner apps, such as Facebook and Instagram. For example, if a user follows a company or likes a promoted post in Facebook, ads for the same or similar products are more likely to appear on both Facebook and Instagram. (Facebook 2018b.)

Most Social Media apps are interested in their users’ “social identity”, which they can use to market to certain people or groups more effectively. Another factor which can affect the ads a user is presented is their own profile information. Social media sites can also utilize information such as place of employment, location, uploaded images and shopping history. With this data, the algorithms are able to match

advertisements to users which fit their profile and interests increasing the likelihood of interaction. (Tuten and Solomon 2017. P. 40-41)

3.1 Instagram

According to Facebook Business 2018, there are 500 million concurrent users of Instagram, using the app on a daily basis. This provides a prime opportunity for ad placement and brand engagement opportunities.

As an example, also shown in figure five, Instagram offers advertisers sponsored posts as photos, photo collections called “carousel ads” or videos. (Instagram 2017a.) These can appear within the user’s home feed, between Instagram “stories” and in the discovery section. Although they do appear in users’ feeds, they appear to be less intrusive to the users’ experience as they can be quickly scrolled past if not interested and do not require an action to bypass.

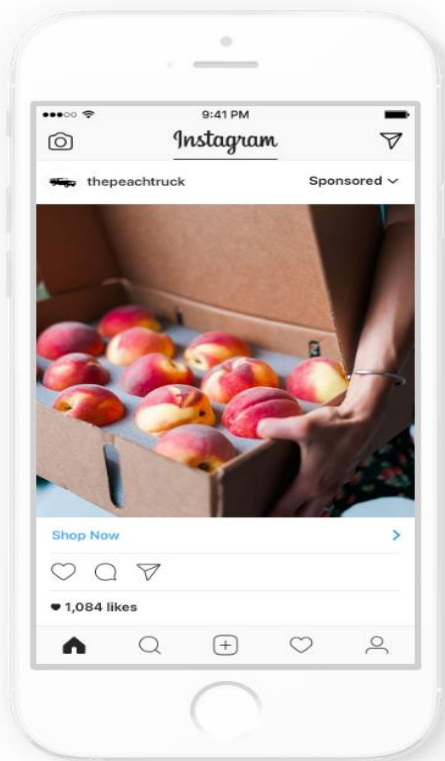


Figure 5. Sponsored Ad Photo (Instagram 2017a)

Both Facebook and Instagram also offer users an ad preferences section within their settings where users can choose what kind of ads they would rather see or not. This could be seen as an incentive as the ads will be shown either way and this allows users to feel they have control and customization of the ads. (Instagram 2017b.)

3.2 Facebook

Although it seems that Instagram is quietly surpassing Facebook in terms of daily interaction user sign-ups, Facebook still has two billion concurrent users on a monthly basis (Facebook Business 2018b).

On the mobile Facebook app, there is less room for traditional ads as the primary location for them, the “side-bar”, is not present due to space restrictions. The most common type of advertisement present on the Facebook App is “suggested posts” which are integrated into your feed much like the Instagram “sponsored posts”. Despite having less space to integrate ads, more than 75% of Facebook’s advertising revenue comes from the mobile app. This insinuates that ads within the mobile app are successful and customers are interacting with them, perhaps even more so than on the desktop website. (Social Bakers 2016.) An article by Forbes 2014 reiterates this, stating that even though mobile app advertisements may only have an average of 1% interaction rates, it is still much higher than the desktop equivalent of 0.1% to 0.2 percent on average.

These suggested posts do have many variations in ad formatting. Each format comes with its pros and cons. Fewer advertisements are using the standard picture ad and opt for more interesting formats such as the slideshow or carousel due to user’s becoming desensitized to photo ads and easily scrolling past them. As mentioned previously, carousel and slideshow ads provide movement within the ad space that can capture a viewer’s eye and hopefully their interest. This is especially useful for companies who want to display multiple items or explain a process, without having to provide a video. While video ads can provide more coverage or explanation of a product or service, many users will not watch an entire video, if they are even willing to click on it at all. (Forbes 2014.)

3.3 Snapchat

Snapchat has an innovative approach to interactive ads by allowing advertisers to create a photo filter related to their company or product. These filters allow users to take a picture of themselves with filters that are often amusing or interesting and then send them to their friends. This style of advertising is non-intrusive to users and actually enjoyable to users in most cases. This also gives the advertising company added value as the user sends the photo through the app's service to their friends, who will also see and perhaps use it themselves. (Snapchat 2017.)

For example, as seen in Figure 6 below, *General Electric* created a filter campaign in December of 2015 through the app to promote their involvement in the transportation industry during the busy holiday season. At the end of the campaign, more than 4 million people used their filter at over 50 travel locations, such as airports and railroad stations. (Vasquez 2016.)

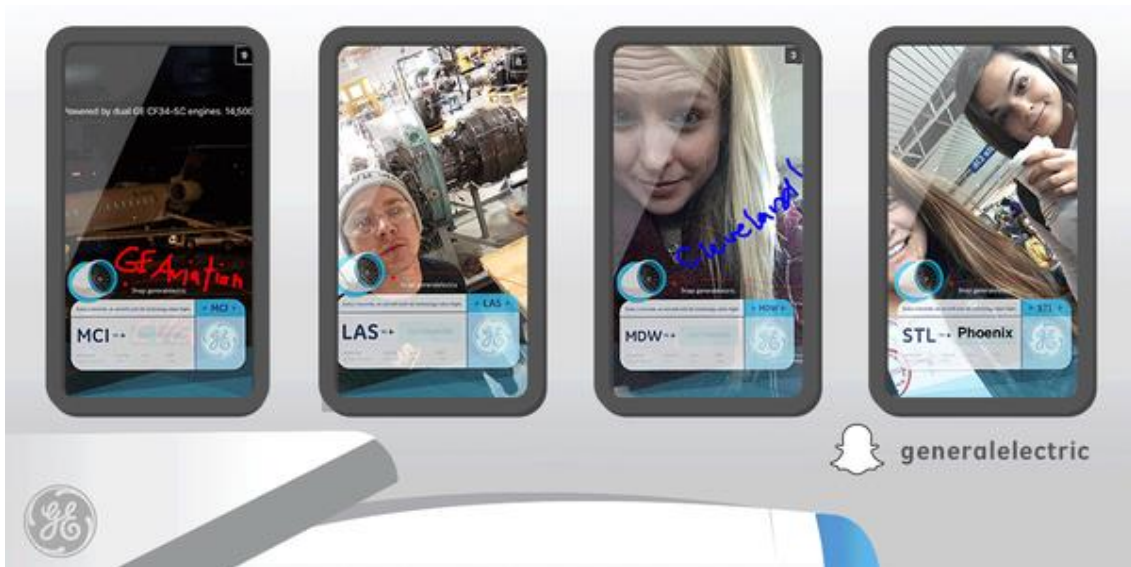


Figure 6. Snapchat Filter Ad, GE Example (Vasquez 2016)

According to Snapchat's advertiser page, this has proved very successful for both Snapchat and various companies' advertising campaigns. Snapchat provides the tools to create "filters" or "lenses" for use within the app.

Advertisers are given the option to select different demographic targets that their ad will be available to, such as age group, income levels and geographic location. While this feature is targeted to businesses, individuals can also create their own filters and lenses for a fee. (Snapchat 2018.)

4 Video Streaming Apps

The two most popular video streaming apps on both the Google Play Store and Apple's App Store are YouTube and Twitch. Both apps are free to download and use, and therefore rely on advertising for some portions of their revenues.

These video streaming apps have used video advertisements, which are presented before the actual video or stream, for many years. However, recently they have also been adding incentives for users to watch the entire ad rather than skipping.

The two companies also treat prominent content creators as "partners", sharing some of the ad revenue and giving creators some control over how many and when ads play over their videos or live streams (Beattie 2017, Twitch 2018). Both also offer monthly subscriptions to a version of the service where ads will never appear and users get added benefits to their viewing experience.

For both of these apps there also appears to be a new phenomenon of viewers intentionally watching ads, without skipping, in order to support the content creators. However, more research is needed to deem how common this is, as there is not official literature or sources discussing this.

4.1 YouTube

More than 50 percent of YouTube's traffic and ad interaction comes from the mobile application version of the service (Johnson 2017). The YouTube App places advertisements within the video player. Ads can appear before, during, and after the video. There are a few variations of ads shown: ads which can be skipped after a few seconds, ads which are six to 20 seconds but are not skippable, and short surveys where the viewer must choose an option to skip past the timer. Creators, or

“YouTubers”, with a large audience can choose intervals in which the ads will appear but not the type of ad which plays over their video. (YouTube 2018a.)

YouTube utilizes an advertising program called TrueView, which offers two different ad formats: “In-stream” and “video discovery”. In-stream ads are the most commonly seen superimposed into the video player before, during, or after the video the user intended to watch. Many of these ads can be skipped after five seconds. However, the content creator and YouTube will only be paid by the advertiser in the event that the users watch 30 seconds or more of the ad, or clicks on the ad. (Beattie 2017.)

The unskippable ads have been present since the introduction of the mobile app, originally as the only type of ad shown, but with the original being 30 seconds rather than 10. YouTube has eliminated 30 second unskippable ads in favor of shorter times or more interactive ads, such as the surveys, which viewers are more likely to watch. Ad companies can purchase promos anywhere from 6 seconds to 20 seconds maximum. This decision was made after an analysis by Google, which found users watching 30 second ads were more likely to become frustrated and have a negative connection with the ad. They infer that this may be because a 30 second ad can be equivalent to one third of the actual video the user is trying to watch. (Johnson 2017.)

YouTube’s paid version, called YouTube Red, offers viewers an ad-free experience. This service also provides other benefits such as YouTube Red originals, which are videos or movies only available to subscribers, and the ability to download videos for offline viewing. This service is \$9.99 per month and auto-renews until the user cancels the service. (YouTube 2018b.)

4.2 Twitch

Twitch is a video streaming service that allows broadcasters to share content with a live audience. The site started as a place for video game content to be broadcasted and viewed, but has since expanded to many communities such as

cooking, painting, education, talk shows and live podcasts. In 2014 Twitch had captured 43.6% of the US total live video streaming traffic. (Cook 2014.)

The apps format is a video player where the broadcaster's content can be seen and a chat box for viewers to interact with each other as well as with the broadcaster. There is no sidebar or banners where ads could be shown. Due to this, ads are exclusively presented as videos when a viewer first enters a live stream. The ad video plays before the live stream footage. Ads can potentially be shown throughout the broadcast, but only if the broadcaster initiates them. (Twitch 2018.)

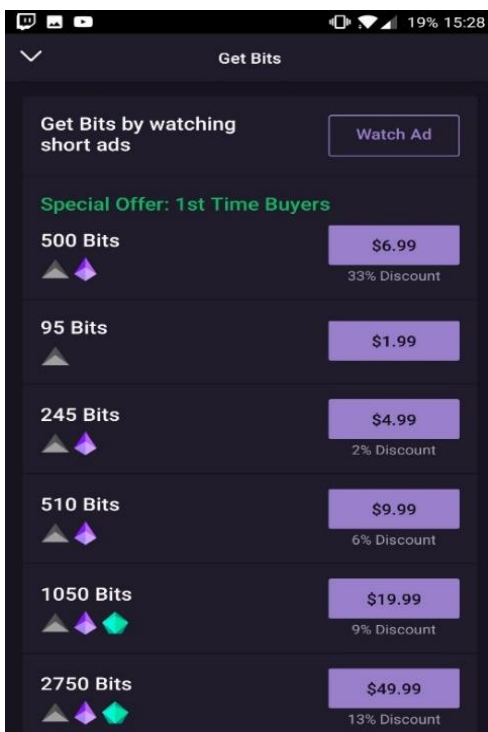


Figure 7. Twitch Bits Example
(Twitch Interactive, Inc. 2018)

Twitch has implemented a new system in which users can opt in to a 30 second ad which awards site currency anywhere from 5-100 "Bits" after completion. This currency can be given to streamers and content creators on the site. This system, called "cheering" by Twitch exchanges every 100 Bits "cheered" to streamers into \$1 USD. This seems beneficial to all involved as Twitch gets their ad revenue, the advertiser gets their ads viewed, the user gains currency that would usually cost

them money, and the content creator makes some money for the content they have created. (Twitch 2017.)

Twitch's paid subscription, called Twitch Prime, actually pairs with an Amazon account ever since Amazon acquired Twitch in 2014. An Amazon Prime account costs \$12.99 per month, or \$99 per year for US members. Twitch Prime is included with this membership and provides subscribers one free subscription to a broadcaster each month, ad-free viewing, free games and occasional in-game content. (Twitch Prime 2018.)

5 Research Method

5.1 Questionnaire Design

The questionnaire used for this research, which can be found in Appendix one, was an online survey through Google Forms. It consisted of four parts: background information, gaming apps, video apps, and social media apps. The final version of the survey consisted of a maximum 22 questions. Parts which were not applicable to the respondent were skipped automatically. For instance, if the respondent selected that they never use gaming applications on their phone, they would not have to answer the following section which included questions only related to gaming apps. Question formats which were presented include multiple choice, Likert scale, and short answer.

All example photos presented within the survey were screenshots taken from popular applications and exclusively for purpose of this thesis paper. This was also done to avoid "doctored" photos which are seen on many apps' advertising pages. This is because such photos are commonly directed towards companies and advertisers to seem more appealing than they actually would be to the average app user. It also ensures that the advertisement being presented is something currently available and recent.

5.1.1 Survey Examples

Some questions presented examples for respondents to view in order to provide a better understanding and a more honest answer. For example, instead of asking “Would you interact with an ad for in-game rewards?”, an example of the ad was shown instead and the user was asked to rate their likelihood to interact with that particular ad.

Four examples were given within the gaming application section and one within the social media section. All examples given within the survey can be seen in figures 8 through 12 below.



Figure 8. Watch Video for Reward (Office Create Corp. 2018.)



Figure 9. Download App for Reward (Nordcurrent 2018.)

The first advertisement example, shown in Figure 8, was an example of an ad which offers the user a chance to gain game currency by watching an ad. It also states: *The more ads you see, the more coins you get!*

Figure 9 presented an example of a third-party app download for rewards. This particular example offers 5000 “coins” if the user installs and runs the company’s other app.



Figure 11. Social Media Interaction for Reward (Nordcurrent 2018)

The third ad, in Figure 10, is an example of gaining game rewards for social media shares of the app or app company’s pages. This particular game offers different amounts for the type of interaction; connecting your account to the game or liking the game’s Facebook page will only provide one gem, while inviting your friends to install the game will grant five.

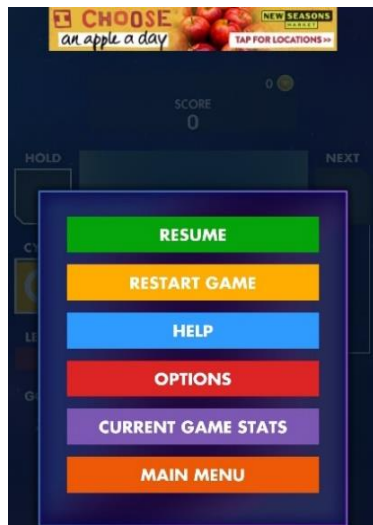


Figure 10. No Reward (Electronic Arts Inc 2018)

Figure 11 shows a more traditional “banner ad” which does not provide any reward, but is consistently on the screen while the app is open. This example was included

to compare the results of how people would interact with ads which give rewards and ads which do not.



Figure 12. Snapchat Promo Example (Snap Inc 2018.)

Figure 12 provides an example of a Snapchat promotional filter. This was included after the test group stated that it was difficult to understand what was a promotional filter and what was not. The filter selected to use as an example is one that was currently usable and easy to distinguish so that respondents could have a better understanding of the question.

The applications included as examples in the survey were chosen because they were in the “Top Free” list in their corresponding categories on app stores. “Top Free” was chosen over “Top Paid” or “Top Grossing” because it is more inclusive and accessible to all types of users. Another reason was that results may be different within a paid app environment.

5.1.2 Test Group

A test group of five individuals were used during the creation of the survey in order to receive feedback and to refine the survey. The test group was aware that the survey was in a draft form and were instructed to give any feedback they felt was important.

While the main goal was to gain as much data as possible on the matter, it was also important to attract many respondents and make the survey straight forward and hassle-free to complete. The test group helped to obtain a balance between data

needs and respondent attention span and commitment. The first draft of the survey had too many questions and three of the five test subjects stated they would not have taken the survey in its entirety if they were presented with it normally.

Another vital feedback comment from the test group was that the way some questions and multiple-choice answers were written seemed to “lead” the respondent to pick a certain answer. For instance, the question “Please select the most important reasons for you to watch an ad within the YouTube or Twitch mobile app” was originally, “Will you watch an ad to support content creators?”. In the original question, there were only “Yes” and “No” as answers. Test responders made the point that not many people will say “No” when the question is presented this way, but that does not necessarily mean that the main reason for watching ads is to support the content creator. These questions were re-written in order to avoid a bias or an inaccurate result.

5.2 Distribution

Distribution of the survey to the target group was executed through social media. A link to the survey was shared via Facebook from three separate accounts: The first account owner was a 23-year-old female student from Saimaa University’s international business degree programme. The second person was a 24-year-old male student from Saimaa University’s mechanical engineering programme. The third person was a 48-year-old female professional in Oregon, USA.

More than one account was chosen to attempt to capture a larger and more diverse audience. The survey was posted twice from the first account; once as the initial distribution and again a week later as a follow-up to gather any other people who may not have seen the first post. The second account posted the survey link twice as well, once together with the main account and the second time a month later. The third account posted only once, a week after the main account’s post.

A cover letter message was also attached in the form of a status message; explaining the survey, what would be required from the respondent in terms of time and information, and gratitude for their assistance.

6 Results and Analysis

The survey collected results from 90 respondents in a 30-day period. The results were exported to a spreadsheet and then imported into a data analytics system called PSPP, a free to use statistic analytics program with the same functionality as SPSS. PSPP was used to analyze the data further than a Google Forms data summary.

6.1 Preliminary Analysis

Before the data was entered into PSPP, it was first analyzed in spreadsheet form to identify any anomalies or mistakes. As an example, one respondent accidentally submitted their response three separate times. In that case, two of the duplicates were removed as they would not have contributed effectively to the data set. Spelling mistakes in single-word entries, such as nationality, were also reviewed and corrected so they could be properly entered in PSPP. A few responses were excluded due to the respondent intentionally entering data which they thought to be humorous, but was not relevant to the survey or questions asked.

6.2 Data Analysis

After the exclusions, a total of 90 responses were collected and analyzed from this survey.

6.2.1 Background Information Questions

The questions presented within the background information were:

- What is your age?
- What country are you from?
- What gender do you identify as?
 - Male
 - Female
- Do you own a smartphone?
 - Yes
 - No

These questions were asked to establish the background of the sample group. The final question was asked to ensure they met the minimum requirement to complete the survey: to own and use a smartphone.

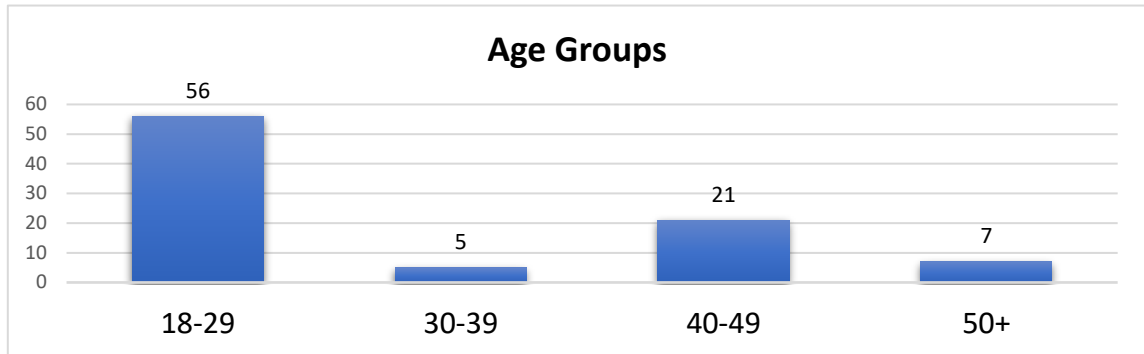


Figure 13. Age Frequencies by Age Group

Of the three accounts where the survey was posted from, two were users ages 23 and 24, and one age 48. This may have allowed for more respondents than if the survey had been shared from people of one age group. The ages of respondents ranged between 19 to 70 years old. The age average was approximately 32 and the most commonly occurring age was 23.

The age group results show similarities to Figure 1, presented in chapter 1.2, which also shows “teenagers” as the group which uses mobile devices the most (And one et al. 2016). The study done for this thesis does not show the same steady decrease as the age groups become older, but this may be due to the age groups of the distributors for this particular study.

The genders represented in this survey were Male and Female. While respondents were able to select which gender they identified as, non-binary genders were not included. While the research objectives and hypotheses do not explicitly discuss how gender differences may impact interaction, it is still an important data point to be observed. From the data, it is clear that a majority of the responses came from women.

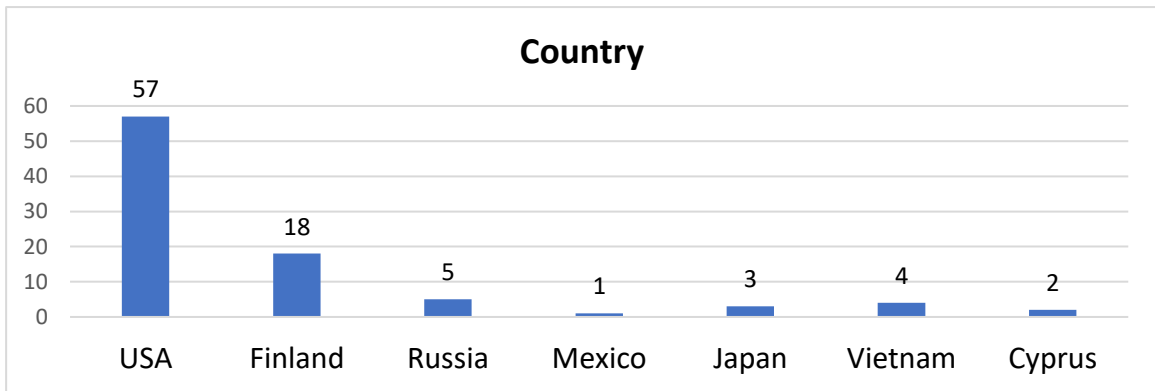


Figure 14. Represented Countries

Seven countries were represented within the results, as shown above in Figure 14. The most common country for the respondents was the USA, with the bulk of the responses, followed by Finland. The amount of responses from the US was to be expected, as two of the three accounts the survey was posted from belong to US citizens.

In order to exclude any results which would not be relevant to the survey, respondents were also asked if they own a smartphone in the background questions. If they answered “No”, then the survey would end instantly. Fortunately, most people who interacted with the survey link read the explanation before answering, and only one person answered that they did not have a smartphone.

6.2.2 Gaming Application Questions

This section began by asking if the respondent regularly used gaming applications on their phone. A “Yes” answer would lead them to the adjoining questions, and a “No”, would move the survey to the next application type. Of the respondents, 47 answered that they used gaming applications on a regular basis.

The next four questions presented the respondent with an example of an ad, shown in chapter 5.1.1, and asked how likely they were to respond on a scale of 1: never, and 5: always. The first ad shows an example of the in-game reward for watching a sponsored video method. The second offers the reward in exchange for downloading and running another app. The third offers the rewards after interaction on social media. The last example, to provide a comparison, offers no reward and is a standard “banner” ad for a supermarket.

The following graph, Figure 15, show the responses from each example.

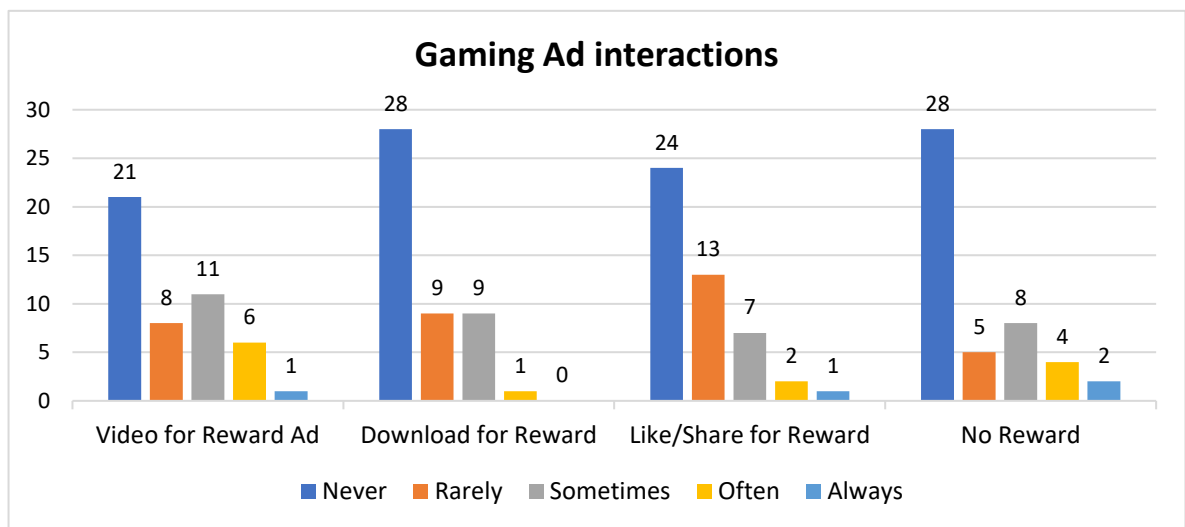


Figure 15. Gaming App Ad Interactions

From this data, it appears as though the most appealing method from those presented was to watch an advertisement video for a reward. This example had the most answers from “sometimes” and above, and the least amount of “never” responses compared to any other example. Fewer people seemed likely to interact with the company on social media or invite their friends to the game, even when offered a reward. This was also the only category which did not receive a single “always” response.

Downloading another app for a reward had more never responses than the other reward types; compared to the other reward incentives, the download advertisement requires the most effort. In order to obtain the reward, the user must exit the app through the download link which routes to the app store, then wait for the app to

install and run it. The other reward incentives can be done from within most apps and do not require as much time or effort on the user's behalf.

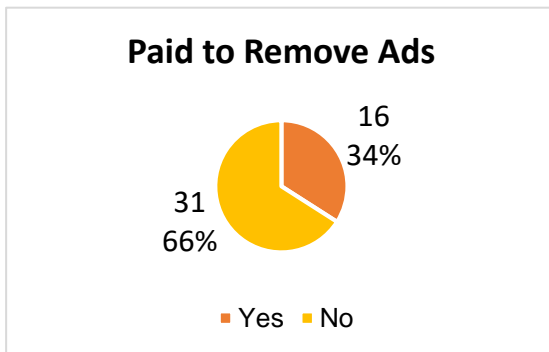


Figure 16. Paid Ad Removal

Overall, there were still many “never” responses in every example. This would infer that most users are still opposed to advertisements in any form, even when in-game reward incentives are given.

Due to the fact that there were more female respondents than male, it might seem that females are using gaming apps more than their male counterparts, when looking at Figure 17. However, the percentages of male and female users are actually quite similar. Overall, 53% percent of the group admitted to using gaming apps. Approximately 52% of the total male respondents and 53% of the total female respondents answered that they are regular users of gaming apps. Which implies that gender does not impact mobile app usage among the sample group.

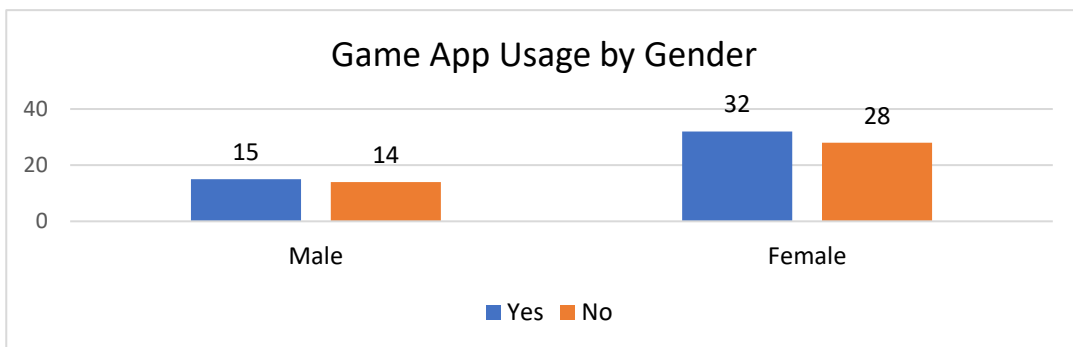


Figure 17. Game App Usage vs Gender

The last question asks respondents if they have ever paid to remove ads from a gaming app. 34% of the respondents admitted to paying to remove advertisements,

while the majority of 66% said they have never paid to remove advertisements, as shown in Figure 16.

Although 66% are not willing to pay, the 34% who are may still be profitable enough for apps to continue providing paid removal of ads as an option. App developers who implement this option within their apps may avoid what is called “banner blindness”, a phenomenon where the user becomes so desensitized by the ads within the app that they do not notice or interact with the ads on a profitable level. In these cases, it is better to receive the one-time income, than to receive nothing in ad revenue because the user is no longer fazed by ads. It also ensures the app receives revenue from that user; they do not have to worry about if the user watched enough of an ad or interacted enough to be profitable because they have already paid. (Haring 2016.) This applies to banner ads, as the name implies, and does not seem to be the case with interstitial ads or video ads as those become a focal point when presented to the user.

6.2.3 Social Media Application Question

The most popular app type among respondents was, by far, social media application, with 97% saying that they regularly use this type of an application on their smart phone.

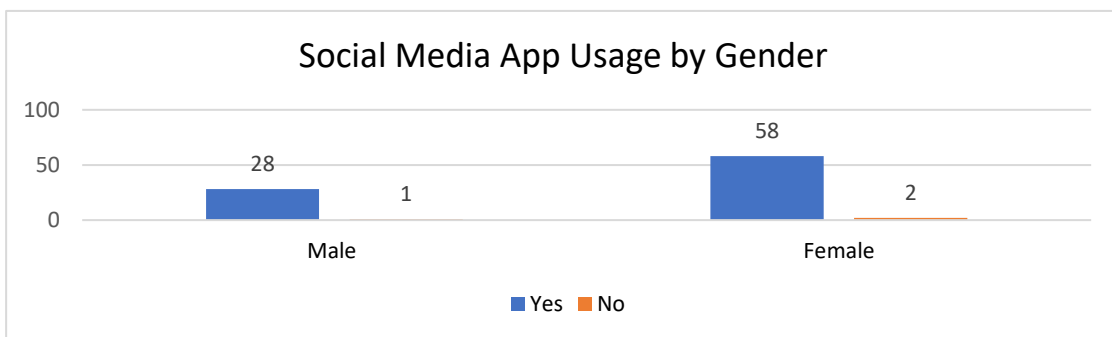


Figure 18. Social Media App by Gender

In this category, once again no difference in the genders’ usage of this app type was found: 97% of females use social media apps, as well as 97% of the male

respondents. Facebook was the most used app by a landslide. Instagram, which has surpassed Facebook on Google Play Store’s “Top Free Social” list, came in second.

There did appear to be some difference in the two genders’ use of specific social media apps. Facebook appears to be used at the same frequency between both genders. Interestingly, Instagram appeared to be used more by females, while Snapchat had a slight usage increase with males. Twitter was the least used with approximately 40% of both genders saying they used this app regularly. This can be seen in figure 19 below:

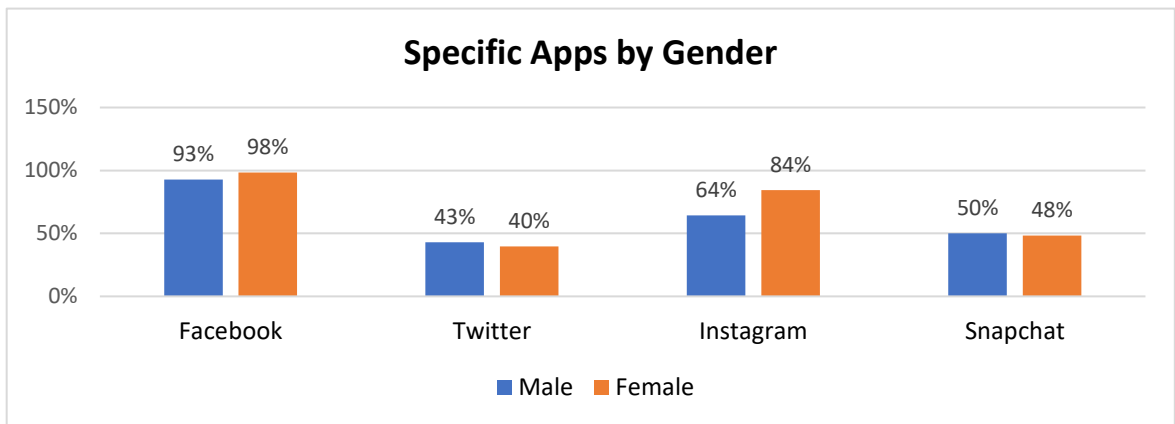


Figure 19. Specific App Usage by Gender

Most users from this sample believed that they are able to identify advertisements throughout social media applications. As a test, after responding to if they were able to identify ads, they were presented with two subsequent images: a “sponsored” post from Instagram, and a “promotional filter” from Snapchat. The respondents were asked if they have interacted with these images before. This data can be seen and compared in Figure 20, shown below:

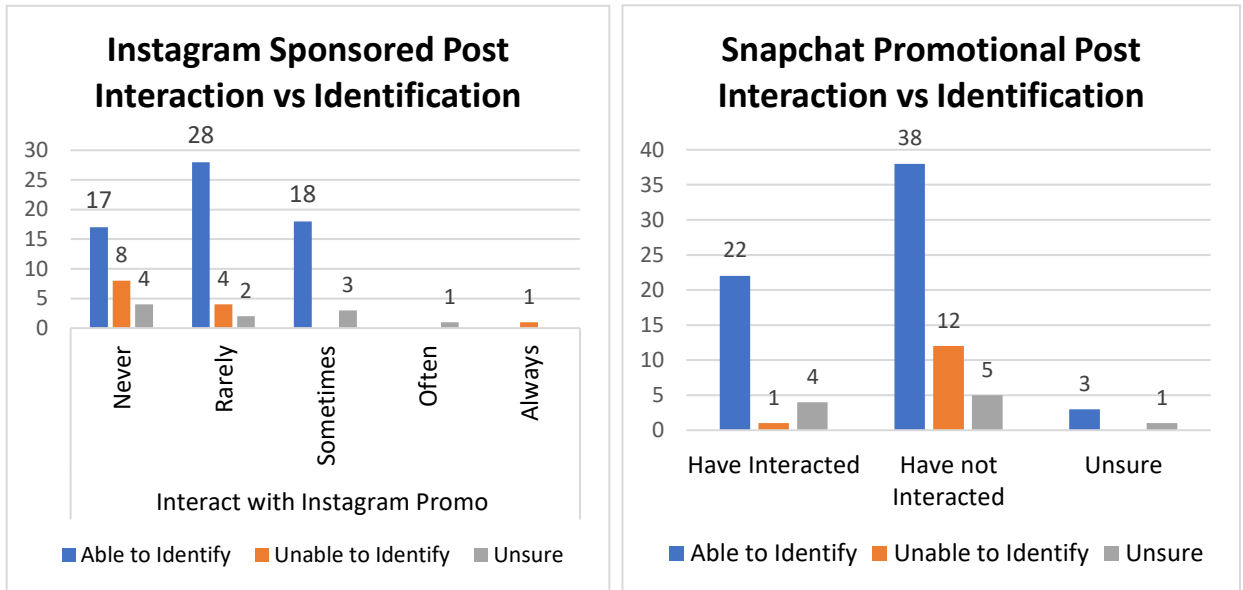


Figure 20. Advertisement Identification vs Ad Interaction in Social Media Apps

The original hypothesis was that users who were able to identify advertisements, such as the examples given, would be less likely to interact with the ads than people who were not able to or were unsure of how to tell if something was an advertisement.

However, looking at the data side-by-side, it appears that all users were less likely to interact with advertisements, whether able to identify or not. Those who were able to identify were also the highest value in the categories: “sometimes interact” with Instagram and “have Interacted” in Snapchat. This could mean that the ads they are being presented with are interesting enough for them to recognize and appealing enough for them to interact with, such as the movie promotion filter example within Snapchat.

The respondents were also asked if they have ever participated in the voluntary ad customization, as seen in Figure 21, available on many of the social media apps. Many users are not actively participating in this service and many were unsure if they had or not, insinuating that users are not being made aware or able to distinguish ad customization options.

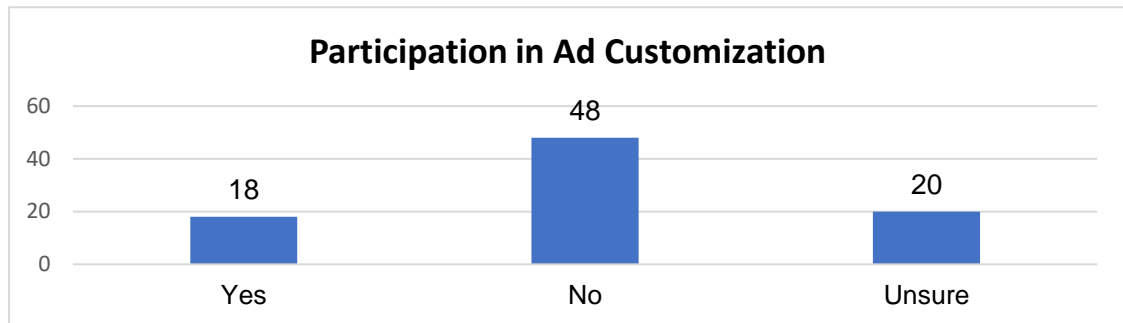


Figure 21. Participation in Ad Customization

6.2.4 Video Streaming Application Questions

Video streaming apps were the second most popular of the three types, with 60% of respondents regularly using an app from this category. Contrary to the other two app types, video apps did appear to have differing usage rates among males and females. Of the male respondents, 72% regularly use video apps, compared to only 53% of the female respondents, which can be seen in Figure 22. This was also the case in the study presented in Figure 2 shown in chapter 1.2 The study had shown that males spent more minutes per day watching videos in video applications such as YouTube than females (And one et al. 2016). In this case, the results draw similarities.

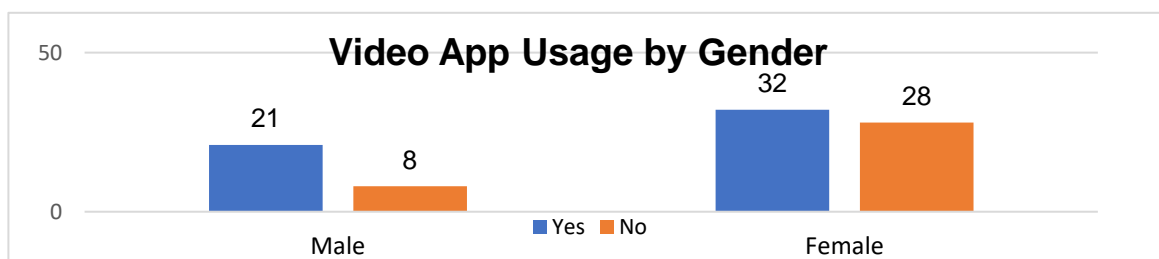


Figure 22. Video App Usage by Gender

Respondents were asked to select reasons for watching an ad rather than skipping it from a list created by the test group. The results show that the most common reasons are that the ad is short, ten seconds or shorter, or that it does not have the option to be skipped at all. Other factors which may have been thought to motivate users were not as common, with an average of 14 people saying that they would watch an ad if it were relatable, humorous or interesting. Results from this question can be viewed in Figure 23, below.

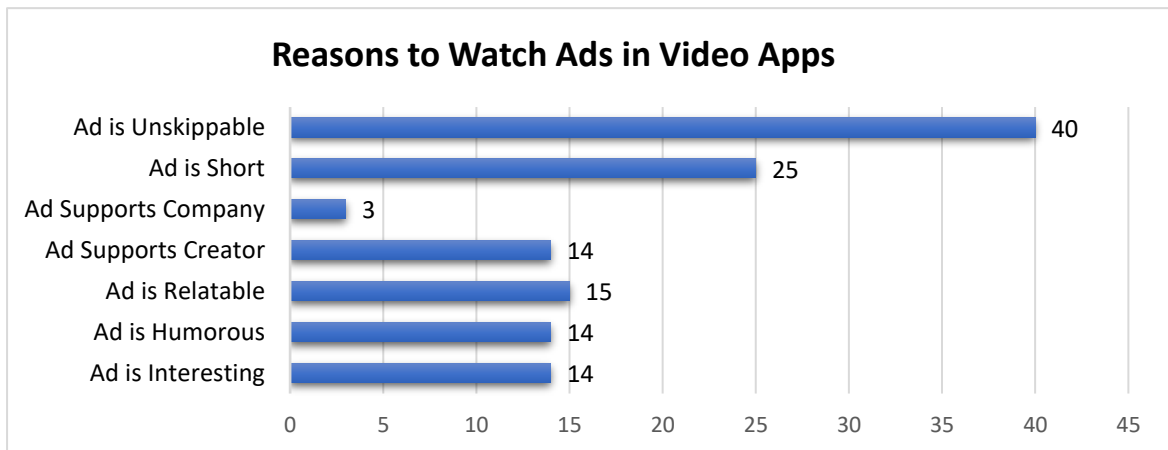


Figure 23. Video App Interaction Reasons

The option “ad is unskippable” was placed in order to be a constant to compare other responses. It was assumed that if the ad is not able to be skipped, the respondents would choose this as an answer for this question. Surprisingly, some respondents did not select this reason, which may mean that they would rather close the video completely than watch an ad which is unskippable.

Concerning creator or company support through ad viewing, users were more interested in supporting creators than companies, but not at as high a value compared to the other reasons. The reason may just be an added bonus to the viewer and not the driving force in the decision-making process to watch a video ad.

Of the responses from the video app use section, 49 of 53 people answered that they use YouTube or Twitch on a daily basis. In an attempt to test if users were willing to pay to remove ads, respondents were asked if they are currently subscribed to the paid monthly service of each app: Twitch “Prime” or YouTube “Red”.

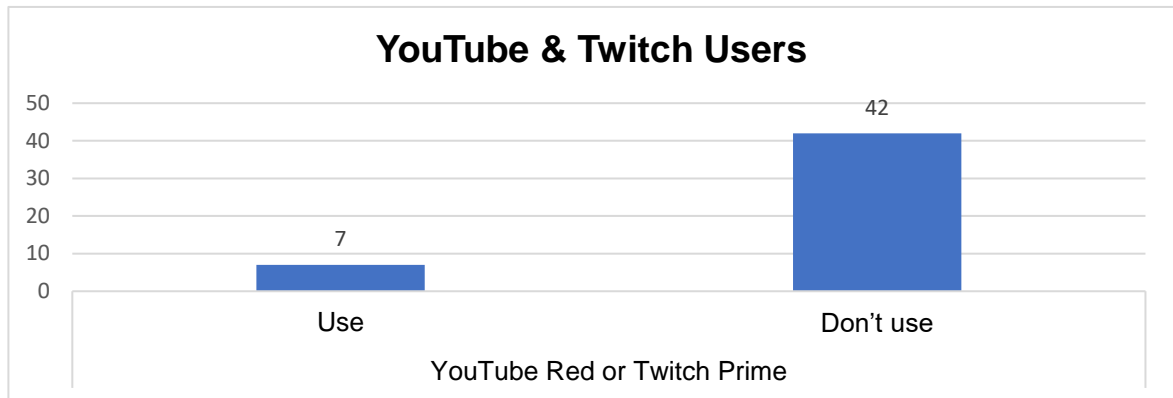


Figure 24. Subscription Service Usage

A vast majority, 86% of the users, do not currently use these premium versions of the app, despite the added benefits Twitch Prime and YouTube Red boast to potential users.

“Cheering”, a specific method of supporting content creators on Twitch, is only used by six of the 49 people, or 12%, who use YouTube and Twitch. This could also be due to the bits costing more than their conversion rate after the initial release of the program.

7 Conclusion

In order to address the previously introduced research objectives, they will be stated again individually and acknowledged with the help of the information gathered.

1. What are the most prominent methods seen in apps by users currently?

Banner, interstitial and video ads appeared to be most commonly present within gaming apps. Some interstitial ads included videos, which may be considered a hybrid of the two formats.

Users are most often presented with “sponsored” and “promoted” posts within their social media apps, which had various formats: photo, video, carousel, and video.

Video streaming apps seem to primarily use video ads at varying intervals within the intended video, also referred to as “in-stream” ads. Some of these video ads can be skipped after a time, and some are unskippable but short.

2. What incentives or rewards are worth watching ads?

Users appeared to be motivated to interact more within gaming apps than the other app groups. This seems to be due to the reward offered having more weight than it would in the other groups. Common rewards can get the user ahead in the game that they are playing or offer a free way to obtain something that would normally cost money. Social media and video apps are not able to offer rewards with the same impact: Not enough respondents participated in ad customization, an incentive given by both Facebook and Instagram, to show users more relevant ads.

As for the hypothesized incentive of supporting content creators in video streaming apps, very few respondents actually felt that they would choose to watch an ad to support creators or the advertising company. Thus, it can be assumed that this incentive is not great enough to influence the majority of users to watch rather than skip ads during videos.

However, not many respondents were willing to pay to remove ads from their mobile app experiences either, neither as a monthly subscription or one-time fee, or even with other added benefits such as exclusive content or free goodies and services.

3. Would users still interact with the same ad if the incentive was taken away?

This can be seen best through the gaming ad examples. The four examples presented to respondents which contained an in-game reward received higher interaction answers than the last example which contained a banner ad for a supermarket, with no reward. Users do not seem motivated to click on ads which do not provide them with a tangible benefit.

Another possible answer to this is that it appeared that some respondents were not aware of or able to identify sponsored content within their social media apps. This could mean that users are either desensitized to ads within their feed and do not even notice them, or they are not interesting enough for the user to pay attention due. Thus, there is no incentive for them to interact or seek out the ad.

4. Is there any truth behind users watching ads rather than skipping within video streaming apps in order to support content creators?

As discussed above, supporting content creators is not as prevalent as was previously discussed in the introduction. When given the option, most users would skip an ad before their intended video. As this concept is still relatively in its adolescence, it may also be that many people are not aware that content creators gain their income from sources such as ad revenue and company sponsorships.

Overall, it appears that app users are still not fond of advertisements interrupting their mobile experiences, but it has become a sort of “necessary evil” in the free-to-use app marketplace since they are similarly unwilling to pay for services or apps which remove advertisements. Most people are able to identify ads in different app types and most do not seem willing to interact with an ad without a driving force such as a reward incentive or niche interest.

New tactics and strategies are constantly being introduced and tested to make ads more appealing towards their target audiences. For example, only weeks after the survey for this thesis was finalized, Snapchat added a whole new interface dedicated to marketing and “brand interaction”, and Instagram added a new method of interstitial ad placement in their new “stories” function available to users. The mobile marketing industry will only continue to evolve as marketers learn more about this relatively new medium and how users react to different methods.

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Appendix

Appendix 1. Questionnaire

Advertisements in Mobile Apps Survey

This survey has a maximum of 22 questions and will take less than 5 minutes to complete.
Your participation is very much appreciated!

* Required

What is your age? *

Your answer

What country are you from? *

Your answer

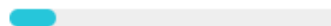
What gender do you identify as?

- Male
- Female

Do you own a smartphone? *

- Yes
- No

NEXT



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Advertisements in Mobile Apps Survey

* Required

Gaming Apps

Do you regularly use gaming apps? *

- Yes
- No

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Advertisements in Mobile Apps Survey

* Required

Gaming Apps (Cont.)

Please rate your willingness to interact with an ad similar to the example below: *



1 2 3 4 5

Never Always

Please rate your willingness to interact with an ad similar to the example below: *



1 2 3 4 5

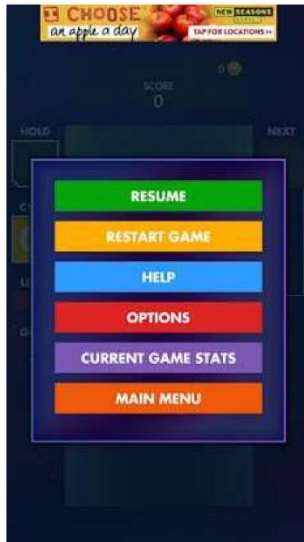
Never Always

Please rate your willingness to interact with an ad similar to the example below: *



1 2 3 4 5
Never Always

Please rate your willingness to interact with an ad similar to the example below: *



1 2 3 4 5
Never Always

Have you ever paid to remove ads? *

- Yes
- No

Advertisements in Mobile Apps Survey

* Required

Video Sharing/Streaming Apps

Do you regularly use video sharing or streaming apps? *

- Yes
- No

BACK

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Advertisements in Mobile Apps Survey

* Required

Video Sharing/Streaming Apps (Cont.)

The questions within this section are regarding YouTube and Twitch's mobile applications.

Do you watch videos or live streams from the YouTube and/or Twitch app? *

- Yes
- No

Do you subscribe to YouTube Red or Twitch Prime? *

- Yes
- No

Have you ever "Cheered" with Twitch Bits through the Twitch app? *

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

Please select the most important reasons for you to watch an ad within the YouTube or Twitch mobile app. (Select all that apply) *

- Ad is interesting
- Ad is humorous
- Ad is relatable or applies to me in some way
- Ad supports content creator
- Ad supports app's company
- Ad is short (<10 Seconds)
- Ad is unskippable

Advertisements in Mobile Apps Survey

* Required

Social Media Apps

Do you regularly use social media apps? *

- Yes
- No

BACK

NEXT

Page 6 of 7

Never submit passwords through Google Forms.

Advertisements in Mobile Apps Survey

* Required

Social Media Apps (Cont.)

Please select the social media apps you have installed on your phone *

- Facebook
- Twitter
- Instagram
- Snapchat

Have you participated in ad customization within any social media app? *

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

Have you ever used a promotional filter in Snapchat? (Example Below) *



- Yes
- No
- Unsure

Are you familiar with "sponsored" or "promoted" posts and can you identify them within your feed? *

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

How often do you interact with "sponsored" or "promoted" posts within social media apps? (Example Below) *



1 2 3 4 5

Never Always

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BACK

SUBMIT

Never submit passwords through Google Forms.