

## Impact of surprise strategy on the avoidance of digital advertising

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### Abstract

Digital advertising is a wide range industry that reaches large scale of audiences in a way that is time saving and extremely personal with a great benefit which is its low cost. Consumers are bombarded with advertising messages that made them feel overwhelmed, overtaxed and annoyed. Consumers are probably avoiding advertisements while they believe that advertisements compete with the habits of their media usage, when they find ads intrusive, and when they indulge in negative advertising behaviors. Negative attitudes toward digital advertising lead to advertisement avoidance. Ad avoidance has resulted in the creation of major threat to the digital advertising continuation as consumers can avoid ads in various ways. Consumers use ad avoidance through ignoring advertisements, skipping video advertisements, scrolling webpages to avoid watching advertisements or even install software to block advertisements and remove pop-up advertisements.

Ad avoidance growth has driven scientific research to study this phenomenon precisely and put solutions to overcome it. When advertiser setup ads that boost advertisement exposure by eliminating user control or effortlessly integrating advertisements into other video content, these ads may be beneficial in gaining user attention. The research results indicate that surprise strategy has a significant impact on decreasing the ad avoidance spread as surprise can directly enhance satisfaction response, as satisfaction is partially affective and yet surprise is still probably the most powerful marketing tool of all, the research reflects the powerful role of surprise strategy especially when added to another feeling as joy in advertisements that attract the consumers' attention resulting in their delight.

### Keywords

Surprise strategy - Ad avoidance - Digital advertising

### المخلص

أصبح الإعلان في العصر الرقمي صناعة واسعة النطاق تصل إلى جماهير غفيرة على نحو يتسم بالفعالية الوقتية وشديد الشخصية بشكل متزايد لها فائدة كبيرة وتمتاز بتكلفتها المنخفضة. يتعرض المستهلكون لسيل من الرسائل الإعلانية التي تجعلهم يشعرون بالإزعاج والارهاق من هذا الكم الهائل من التدخل في خصوصية المستهلك. ربما يتجنب المستهلكون الإعلانات بينما يعتقدون أن الإعلانات تتنافس مع عادات استخدام الوسائط الرقمية المتعددة الخاصة بهم، وعندما يجدون الإعلانات تدخلية، وعندما يغمسون في سلوكيات الإعلان السلبية. المواقف السلبية تجاه الإعلان الرقمي تؤدي إلى تجنب الإعلان وتجنب رؤيته. نتج عن تجنب الإعلانات خلق تهديد كبير لاستمرار الإعلان الرقمي حيث يمكن للمستهلكين تجنب

الإعلانات بطرق مختلفة. يستخدم المستهلكون تجنب الإعلانات من خلال تجاهل الإعلانات أو تخطي إعلانات الفيديو أو تصفح صفحات الويب لتجنب مشاهدة الإعلانات أو حتى تثبيت البرامج لحظر الإعلانات وإزالة الإعلانات المنبثقة وإعلانات اللافتات.

لقد دفع نمو تجنب الإعلانات البحوث العلمية إلى دراسة هذه الظاهرة بدقة ووضع حلول للتغلب عليها، عند إعداد إعلانات المعلنين التي تزيد من تعرض الإعلانات عن طريق القضاء على تحكم المستخدم أو دمج الإعلانات دون عناء في محتوى فيديو آخر، قد تكون هذه الإعلانات مفيدة في جذب انتباه المستخدم. تشير نتائج البحث إلى أن إستراتيجية المفاجأة لها تأثير بالغ الأهمية على تقليل انتشار تجنب الإعلان حيث أن المفاجأة يمكن أن تعزز استجابة الرضا بشكل مباشر، حيث أن الرضا يكون عاطفياً جزئياً، ومع ذلك لا تزال المفاجأة أقوى أداة تسويق على الإطلاق، يعكس البحث الدور القوي لإستراتيجية المفاجئة خاصة عند إضافتها إلى شعور آخر كالمرح في الإعلانات التي تجذب انتباه المستهلكين مما يؤدي إلى سعادتهم.

### الكلمات المفتاحية

استراتيجية مفاجأة، تجنب الإعلان، الإعلان الرقمي

## Research Problem

Surprise exposes consumers to new stimuli which have a significant role in confronting digital ad avoidance phenomenon, so research problem is demonstrated in answering the following questions:

1. What are the ways used to confront digital advertising avoidance?
2. How can we attract the attention of consumers to avoid ad avoidance?
3. What is the role of surprise strategy confronting ad avoidance?

## Research Importance

1. Identify the ad avoidance phenomenon and the challenges facing digital advertising.
2. Determine the attention factors and how to attract targeted audience attention in the digital advertising.
3. Specify the surprise strategy to face the ad avoidance phenomenon.

## Research Aims

1. Study the ad avoidance phenomenon and ways to face it.
2. Use the attention factors to surprise the targeted audience in the digital advertising.
3. Study the impact of surprise strategy and the way to decrease ad avoidance.

## Research Hypothesis

1. The ad avoidance phenomenon can be affected by surprise strategy.
2. Usage of surprise strategy achieves the highest level to attract attention.

## Research Methodology

The research uses the qualitative method as it is the study that is used to explore a phenomenon by collecting data and images and analyzing them in this research.

## Introduction

The over changing digital technology impacts the advertising industry's reform and growth (Quanyi, Zhao, and Huang Wei, 2010)<sup>17</sup>. Consumers are faced with a significant number of

advertisements for several products and services in current days. One of the major challenges for advertising in such a cluttered media environment is to attract and retain the attention of consumers. It is observed that consumers are presented with a diverse selection world with many brands that have both growing and special features (Loef, Joost J., 2002)<sup>14</sup>. In modern consumer society, the natural environment is overburdened, the citizen is overworked, and the consumer is overtaxed (Brooks, Keith, 2007)<sup>4</sup>.

Despite the initial optimism regarding the Internet's advertising opportunities, a number of difficulties are facing it such as banner blindness, spam emails and pop-up ads have triggered Internet ad annoyance and avoidance study, which has normally considered that Internet advertising has resulted in massive rates of ad annoyance and ad avoidance relative to other media (Young, Joshua Dale, 2016)<sup>23</sup>. Digital advertising can be regarded as not only intrusive to privacy, but also irritating, as they can be diverted from the primary content they want to consume. This situation has resulted in a spread of tools to avoid or block ads (Pujol et al., 2015)<sup>16</sup>. Ad avoidance as a form of customer reaction to commercials has received considerable research attention since the 1980s, when commercial TV zipping and zapping are becoming a significant problem impacting advertising consequences and effectiveness. Some of the current ad-avoidance research tend to rely on TV commercial avoidance, but ad-avoidance studies in other means of media, which include print, online, and mobile, are on the boost (Kim, Soojung, 2015)<sup>12</sup>.

### **Ad avoidance & its characteristics**

Advertising avoidance is a critical problem for advertisers (Hussain & Lasage, 2014)<sup>10</sup>. Kim (2015) identified Ad avoidance “all actions by media users that differentially reduce their exposure to ad content,” and added that Ad-avoidance is the result of the user's conscious attempts to try just not to be subjected to ads, the cognitive, affective, and attitudinal reactions to ads have been investigated in a number of researchers as having a important impact on ad-avoidance factors<sup>12</sup>. (AATs) Ad-avoidance technologies enable users to draw off content and discard advertising<sup>2</sup> (Anderson et al., 2011). One of the main reasons for avoiding ads is the lack of confidence in advertisement. Mistrust is demonstrated by the fact that the role of ads is viewed more as a deceptive method than an informative one. Trust is a key factor of the nature of the relationship between the consumer and the brand. Failure to trust might have a positive relationship with the avoidance (Hussain & Lasage, 2014)<sup>10</sup>. Kim (2015) confirmed that Ad-avoidance was conceived as a user effort to minimize the intensity of ad-exposure and classified as cognitive and behavioral ad-avoidance and added that Ad avoidance can be tested by human observation, by computer observation with an eye-tracking device, or by self-reported measurements<sup>12</sup>. Yet even with the boom in the online video advertising market, there is now an increasing trend to avoid advertising. Video advertising, in particular, is a genre that is very much opposed and avoided. As a result of this, video advertisers are losing the opportunity to communicate their advertisements to customers (Henger et al., 2016)<sup>9</sup>.

### **Consequences of Ad avoidance**

Kim (2015) studied the impact of zipped advertisements on advertisement efficacy, such as product recall, brand recognition, retention and perception of ad content, and attitudinal

responses. In terms of product recall, brand recognition, and recall and recognition of ad content, zipped ads were lower than fully exposed ads, whereas zipped ads resulted in slightly more positive attitudes towards ads and brands than completely exposed ads and added that if viewers have not got the authority to manage their ad exposure (i.e. they were required either to watch the full ad or to quickly forward the ad to the researcher, depending on the experimental condition), the zipped ads created relatively positive attitudes towards the ad and the product than the totally exposed ads<sup>12</sup>.

### **Overcoming Ad avoidance**

When advertisers' setup ads that boost ad exposure by eliminating user control or effortlessly integrating ads into other video content, these ads may be beneficial in gaining user attention, meanwhile, may create strongly negative user responses to the ad and to the announced product. On the other side, whether ads provide users plenty of user control options to avoid ad exposure, including giving the opportunity to skip ads, most of the users would probably avoid them and, as a result, ads would have no or only minimal impact combined with a lack of adequate exposure (Kim, 2015)<sup>12</sup>. Research in the sense of digital advertising, especially pop-ups and banners, indicate that website congruent ads are considered to become less invasive resulting in much more positive attitudes to such ads). Ads that are consistent with current expectations and mental activities are viewed as positive social factors and thus bring value to the consumer (Henger et al., 2016)<sup>9</sup>.

### **Consumers & their relation to Ad avoidance**

Consumers are probably avoiding advertisements while they believe that advertisements compete with their media usage habits, when they find ads annoying, and when they indulge in negative advertising behaviors as a whole<sup>12</sup> (Kim, 2015). OVA avoidance can be demonstrated by action taken by customers to stop advertising; it can be achieved by closing the promotional window or by ignoring the commercial, as it is sometimes necessary for some players to have complete access to the required content. Electronic avoidance is now also available including the use of Web technologies; users who are kind of feeling annoyed can use particular software to stop advertising and remove pop-ups<sup>10</sup> (Hussain & Lasage, 2014).

User trends, ad positioning and message influences, and customer reactions to advertisements have been identified as having an influence on the avoidance of advertisement. More precisely, those who are younger, males, affluent, and more educated are more likely to avoid advertising and added that in aspects of ad placement considerations, previous research on TV commercial avoidance shows that ads located in the middle of media content are less likely to be avoided, whilst research on online ad avoidance reveals that ads placed in the middle of media content are actually more likely to be avoided<sup>12</sup> (kim, 2015).

Consumers like to choose what they want and need to watch. They choose to make the decision when and how to deliver an advertising message. The reality that consumers are now saturated towards advertising messages is a serious threat to advertisers and can also result in a negative perception of the communication brand. Consumer involvement in the marketing system of companies is not a new idea<sup>10</sup> (Hussain & Lasage, 2014).

"Banner blindness" is the term that describes how end users will deliberately avoid staring at a web banner ad in order to maintain their focus on the task at hand. A further reason that users

might be less responsive to online advertising is that they are flooded with ads. An excess of distracting online clutter will lead consumers to avoid digital marketing all together<sup>20</sup> (Taken Smith, 2012).

### Surprise strategy and its characteristics

Mathew (2015) outlined that all brands make good use of surprise-and-delight strategies, generating powerful buzz and brand loyalty not only among their most passionate fans, but also with new audiences, thanks to the ability to share updates with friends via social networks<sup>18</sup>. Surprise strategies for delighted consumers have been illustrated and evaluated in a few empiric studies in the literature on services (Gyung Kim, Min, and Anna S. Mattila, 2013)<sup>8</sup>. Surprise is elicited with the aid of unexpected activities (Alden et al.,2000)<sup>1</sup>. Surprise also differs from most other feelings in that a particular "tone" or valence isn't always necessarily associated with that arousal (Alden et al.,2000)<sup>1</sup>, While Oliver in Lindgreen et al. (2003) ascertained that surprise can also directly enhance satisfaction response, as satisfaction is partially affective and yet surprise is still probably the most powerful marketing tool of all<sup>13</sup>. Surprise additionally differs from most other emotions in this a particular "tone" or valence is not essentially related to that arousal and added that Joy is originally pleasant and fear is originally unpleasant, whilst surprise may end up in pleasant, unpleasant or definite feelings depending on contextual factors<sup>1</sup>. Surprise is obviously still the strongest marketing tool of all<sup>19</sup>. New studies of surprise show that surprise is a short-lived neutral emotion with an "intensity from mild to extreme". As a neutral emotion, surprise is measured by the emotions that closely follow it<sup>8</sup>.

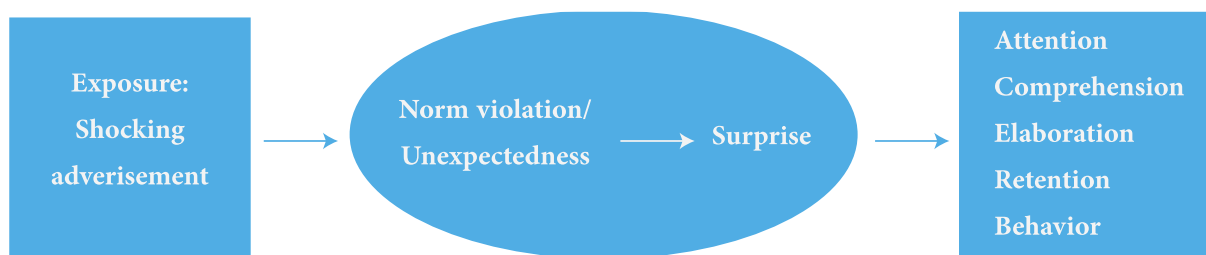


Figure (1) A Preliminary Model of Consumer Reactions to Shock Appeals  
(Dahl, Frankenberger, & Manchanda, 2003)

Surprise facilitates more cognitive engagement as individuals seek to understand the cause of their surprise and added that further processing of marketing information shall take the form of comprehension, basic interpretation of the message and elaboration, creation of product, message-related thoughts<sup>5</sup>, see figure (1).

Hutter et al. (2014) surprising advertising is often seen as guerrilla marketing. The primary purpose of the guerrilla concept is to produce high attention at low cost<sup>11</sup>.

### Impact of Surprise and its importance

Hutter & Hoffmann, (2014) asserted that surprise elicits response at various levels<sup>11</sup>. Surprise may be beneficial in a variety of contexts. For instance, it has been asserted that surprise is a

privileged way of capturing consumer attention in our age of overabundance of advertising (Derbaix & Vanhamme, (2003)<sup>6</sup>. Surprised people disrupt their daily tasks and concentrate on the surprise-evoking activity. Many studies have studied the effect of surprises on consumer satisfaction and customer delight. On the other hand, few studies examine the effect of surprise in the advertising context. Surprise analysis is integrated in studies that focus specifically on creativity, humor, or unpredicted information (Hutter & Hoffmann, (2014)<sup>11</sup>. Surprise is also distinct from Joy in the way that it is an indication of instant feelings, that are also “instances of visceral factors which grab people's attention and motivate them to participate in specific behavior and also play a critical role in inter temporal choices” (Teixeira, 2009)<sup>21</sup>. Therefore, Teixeira also believed that, to the point that surprise is higher in frequency, surprise would have a stronger impact on focused attention diffusion than joy<sup>21</sup>. Several studies have shown that surprise increases marketing effectiveness and added that it was recently discovered that surprising directionality is increasing curiosity, which makes consumers pay attention and stimulate them (Hutter & Hoffmann, 2014) <sup>11</sup>.

To spot the light on the cognitive process, Hutter & Hoffmann provided proof that the feeling of surprise enhances customer attitudes towards advertisement. Surprise increases interest and removes the incongruous aspect of the surprising ambient media evokes a positive effect, which is then converted to a positive Ad. Surprise is also an amplifier for the corresponding consumer assessment of the ad (such as creativity). Although surprise has no benefit, it attracts attention which amplifies good or bad ad evaluations<sup>11</sup>. Teixeira (2009) proclaimed that joy and surprise emotions in the advertisements directly influence the decision of the viewers to resist commercial moments, by minimizing zapping, and subtly by inducing a rise in the attention dispersion of the audience, with a resulting decrease in dispersion of Surprise due to redirecting<sup>21</sup>.

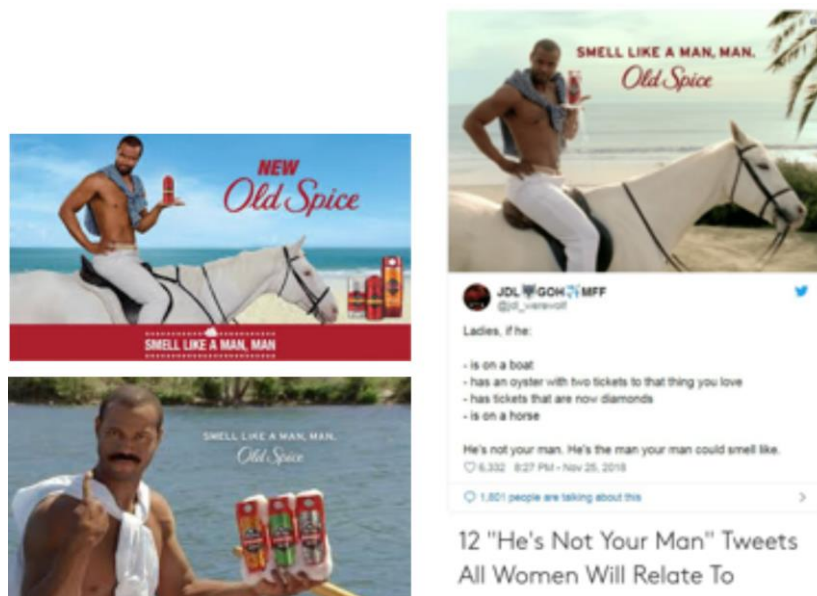


Figure (2) Old Spice TV commercial ad- “The Man Your Man Could Smell Like,” (2010)

Old Spice wanted a surprising campaign that would appeal to both men and women. While two TV ads were aired in 2010, the real success of the campaign was found on social media. The creative team noticed that the ad was getting a lot of attraction online and decided to follow up the TV spots with an interactive video campaign. To achieve this, they responded to customers

on Facebook and Twitter with short, personalized videos using the same tone and the character. The reactions from consumers were amazing, earning Old Spice’s videos almost 11 million views, 29,000 Facebook fans and 58,000 new Twitter followers.

In the figure below, the campaign used the slogan “Be Wowed” which means to be surprised and they have done it through making monkeys talk and resemble belly dancer, the drummer and the kidnaper in a humorous scene with surprising emotion but all this surprising scene didn’t surprise the kidnapped one but only the wafer Freska could do so.

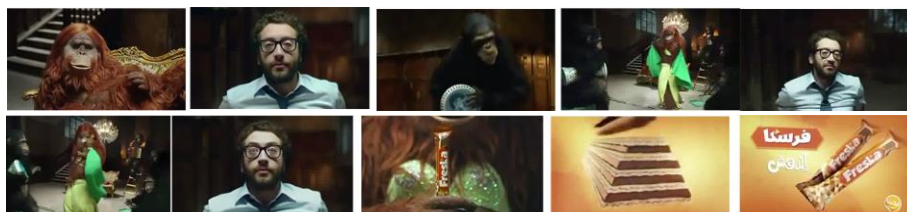
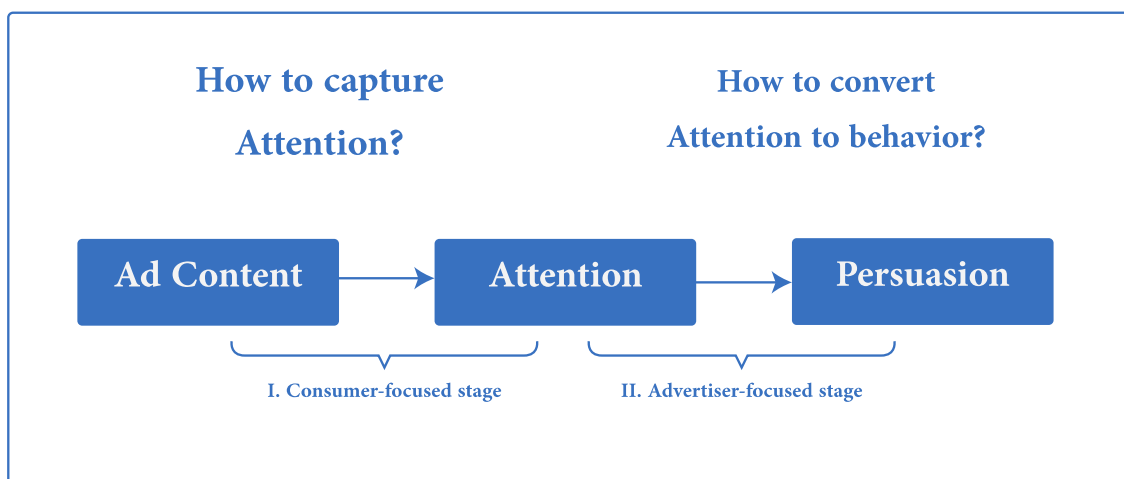


Figure (3) Freska “Indahesh” commercial ad, still shots (2012).

### Attention as a main ingredient in advertising

Teixeira (2014) differed attention into two parameters: intensity and duration. Intensity is an indicator of the quality of the attention throughout a period, whereas duration is a measure of its quantity<sup>22</sup>. Oakley (2009) defined Attention as it is “the taking possession by the mind, in a clear and vivid form, of one out of what seem several simultaneously present objects or trains of thought.”<sup>15</sup> Teixeira, T. S. (2014) ascertained that attention is the essential ingredient of effective advertising and added that the consumer attention market (or "eyeballs") is now so competitive that attention can be considered as a currency<sup>22</sup>. Barnes (2002) determined that attention is a key aspect, generally assessed by the recognition or recall of ad cues. In a worst case scenario, the user can forget or ignore a mobile ad or choose the ' skip ' option on a mobile interstitial and noted that if attention is drawn, other outcomes are likely to follow. These may involve clicking on the phone, e-mailing an advertiser's reference, or buying a product or service<sup>3</sup>. Gökerik et al. (2018) clarified that there is that dissatisfaction with advertising messaging, as customers frequently try to avoid it (e.g. by avoiding adverts on YouTube), and therefore advertisers need to extend these different techniques in order to reach more people and asserted that brands employ a number of strategies to draw customer attention including publicity campaigns and product placement<sup>7</sup>.





**Figure (4) A simple model of advertising, (Teixeira, Thales S., 2014)**

Teixeira, T. S. (2014) assessed that advertisers first create ad content that needs to attract the attention of the customer. When attention is attracted, the commercials need to be persuaded to alter the consumer's perceptions or habits with respect to a product or brand. The two questions that marketers always need to answer are how to gain attention cost-effectively and how to turn attention to buying actions (see figure 4).

Since consumers decide, for the most part, how focus is directed, marketers must answer the first question by knowing what consumers are keen to learn about this or experiencing. This should have been a consumer-focused stage. Without it, consumers may ignore the message even before they have a chance of just being assessed and added that the second option is to pay attention without actually purchasing access to the audience. In this solution, content must be sufficiently compelling for consumers to deliberately seek out brand messages. Advertisers typically spend large sums of money creating websites and video content that they are looking for<sup>22</sup>.

## Results

The research results in the following:

- Ad avoidance is a real threat to the growth of digital advertising media.
- Consumers are overwhelmed and saturated with annoying advertising messages.
- Consumers annoyance with advertising messaging resulted in ad avoidance.
- Surprise strategy has a great impact on attention of consumers.
- Attention is the essential ingredient of effective advertising.
- Surprise when added to joy results in consumer delight and increasing the likability of the advertisements shown.
- Surprise increases marketing effectiveness and directionality is increasing curiosity.

## Conclusion

Due to the growth of ad avoidance phenomenon where consumers tend to skip video ads, banner blindness, ignoring the ads, remove pop-ups, stop ads or even close them. Consumers are overwhelmed with advertising messages which threaten the digital advertising platform and has a negative perception on the communication brand. Consumers tend to watch ads using surprising strategies which attract their attention resulting in decrease of ad avoidance. Surprise focuses specifically on creativity, humor, or unpredicted information. Joy and surprise emotions in the advertisements directly influence the decision of the viewers to resist commercial moments, by minimizing ad avoidance. Surprise is also distinct from Joy in the way that it is an indication of instant feelings

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