

Consumers prepared to abandon brands appearing alongside objectionable content

A new CMO Council study on 'How Brands Annoy Fans', surveyed 2,000 adults in the US, Canada and UK to reveal that 48% of consumers will abandon brands they love if their ads run alongside objectionable online content. These regions have seen high profile campaigns withdrawn this year for their association with fake, distressing and hateful content.



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In addition, despite delivering the second most ad messages behind TV, social media platforms are the least trusted among the top five media channels and 63% of consumers respond more positively to the same ads when they find them on established media channels. The report also found that social media platforms are still not trusted content spaces. They ranked friends, TV, search engines and newspapers as more trusted sources.

Aimed at assessing the impact of digital advertising experiences on consumer perceptions and purchase intent, the research looked at digital brand safety from the consumer's perspective and found that consumers are punishing even preferred brands if they don't use trusted media platforms or take active steps to control the integrity of their ad environments.

Conducted by The Chief Marketing Officer (CMO) Council, using the Pollfish platform, the consumer focus is part of a broader study of digital brand safety being conducted by the CMO Council, in partnership with Dow Jones, entitled 'Brand Protection from Content Infection'.

With trust more critical than ever, respondents made it clear that they will no longer give their brands a pass for even the inadvertent display of ads near objectionable digital and video content. A full two-thirds of respondents said they would hold a dimmer view of brands that provided ‘negative advertising experiences’.

A large majority of consumers said they responded differently to the same ad, depending on its context, with 63% saying they responded more positively to ads run in trusted media channels.

Consumers are turning to trusted content providers and media to escape objectionable content. Some 60% said offensive context had already caused them ‘to consume more content from trusted, well-known news sources and established media channels’.

“CMOs and brand advertisers are increasingly concerned about various aspects of digital and programmatic advertising, including concerns about their ads showing up next to offensive content,” said Donovan Neale-May, executive director of the CMO Council. “This consumer survey demonstrates that those concerns are well founded. Advertising placed next to objectionable content is damaging to a brand, while ads that accompany more trusted content and media are more accepted.”

Ad blockers grow with consumer distrust

Marc Pritchard, CMO of P&G, has been highly critical of problems with digital advertising. “We have seen an exponential increase in, well ... crap. Craft or crap? Technology enables both and all too often, the outcome has been crappier advertising accompanied by even crappier viewing experiences. Is it any wonder ad blockers are growing 40%?”

While other brand safety studies have explored adverse brand perceptions, the CMO Council research asked consumers their response to the experience of finding brand ads in proximity to objectionable content or fake news sites—and their warning to advertisers was brutal. Some 37% of consumers said it would change the way (they) think of a brand when making a decision to buy. Another 11% said they would flat-out not do business with that brand. Moreover, another 9% said they would become vocal critics of the brand.

Another consumer response is the increased use of ad blockers. In another alarming finding for digital marketers, more than 50% of respondents said they either already had or planned to install some form of ad blocking software to their mobile devices or PC browsers.

Negative experiences with digital display advertising are far from a rarity. According to the most recent Media Quality Report by Integral Ad Science, 8.6% of digital display ads in the US turned up on content flagged as posing a moderate or high risk to brand reputation. Maria Pousa, CMO for IAS, told the CMO Council that the most prevalent categories of risk in the US were violent, adult or offensive language content, followed by issues like hate speech and illegal downloads.

Other key insights

Other key insights of the CMO Council survey include:

- A surprising 86% of consumers are either extremely concerned, very concerned or moderately worried about how easily they are directed or redirected to hateful or offensive content.
- The most annoying digital advertising formats, even when appearing on trusted media channels, were intrusive pop-up ads (22%) and auto-playing video ads (17%).
- Attention to digital advertising overall was notably low, with only 14% always engaged, and 58% saying they pay attention only when ads either “interest me” or are “really interesting.”
- Just over 40% of consumers have already installed ad-blocking software on their devices, while another 13.7% said they planned to add these features.

Neale-May said the full report, featuring qualitative interviews and vendor insights, would include key details on the steps,

tools and strategies adopted by leading advertisers and CMOs who have minimised the threat to their brands. The abbreviated consumer survey findings can be sourced from the CMO Council [program page](#).

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