Bulbshare

Ad blockers and advocacy:
Why gen Z is blocking paid ads in favour of real voices

How to beat the ad blockers and connect with youth audiences via authentic brand advocacy...

Ad blockers and advocacy:

Why gen Z is blocking paid ads in favour of real voices

How to beat the ad blockers and connect with youth audiences via authentic brand advocacy...

Armed with ad blockers, volume control and the almighty skip button, consumers are pulling out all the stops to resist traditional advertising. With the finger of **99% of customers poised and ready to hit skip, and 63% of consumers' browsers bulwarked with ad blockers**, advertising is undergoing a reckoning.

From billboards and posters to streaming ads and pop ups, advertising's metamorphosis has only increased consumer frustration. As it becomes more advanced, it becomes more intrusive - and consumers are refusing to play along.

Our insights are taken from a UK general population panel composed of 600+ respondents. These respondents are made up of 45% 16-25 year olds, 34% 26-50 year olds and 21% 51+. 66.4% of the panel are female, and 33.5% are male.

99% of customers poised and ready to hit skip

63% of consumers' browsers bulwarked with ad blockers

BULBSHARE

AD BLOCKERS AND ADVOCACY

But when every door closes, another opens. From the troubles of traditional advertising grew influencer marketing, and from the complaints of inauthenticity in influencer marketing grew genuine customer advocacy.
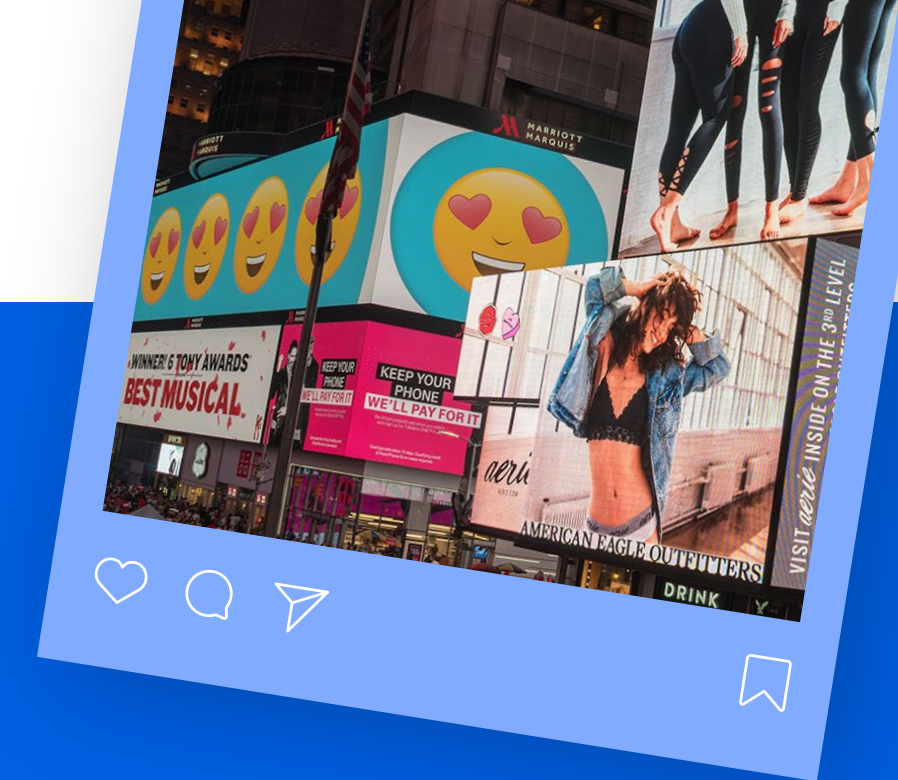
Tracking the transition from advertising to advertainment to advocacy brings us to the most authentic and effective solution of all. Welcome to a new dawn of marketing, where symmetrical models of communication reign.

We asked our UK customer insights community how they respond to these three stages of advertising. Here's what they have to say...

75% feel bombarded with advertisements

74% find themselves irritated by this incursion on their time

01

'Tradvertising': The rejection of traditional advertising

Attention is currency, and consumers are refusing to pay up.

75% feel bombarded with advertisements throughout their daily lives, with 74% finding themselves irritated by this incursion on their time. And it's not just a mild disruption, either: 1 in 4 find advertising extremely intrusive, whilst 1 in 2 believe it is somewhat disruptive. Only 7% voted that they are not in any way distracting or troublesome.

There's something to be said for advertising causing disruption as a sign post of it doing its job. The most annoying, repetitive, and intrusive ads may well be the ones we remember. Though there's something to be said for provoking a strong reaction, when an ad causes more irritation than interest, it isn't conducive to brand loyalty. As Craig Davis say, "We need to stop interrupting what people are interested in & be what people are interested in."

It's this awareness of being advertised to that is part of the problem. Howard Luck Gossage says, "Nobody reads ads. People read what interests them, and sometimes it's an ad."

TRADVERTISING

Hyper-awareness of targeting has made the community shut down, with over half of the Bulbshare community having an ad blocker installed on their browser, and 75% trying their best to avoid ads at any opportunity. And, if there's a skip button on an ad, 99% said they'd be likely to press it, with half specifying they would always skip the ad.
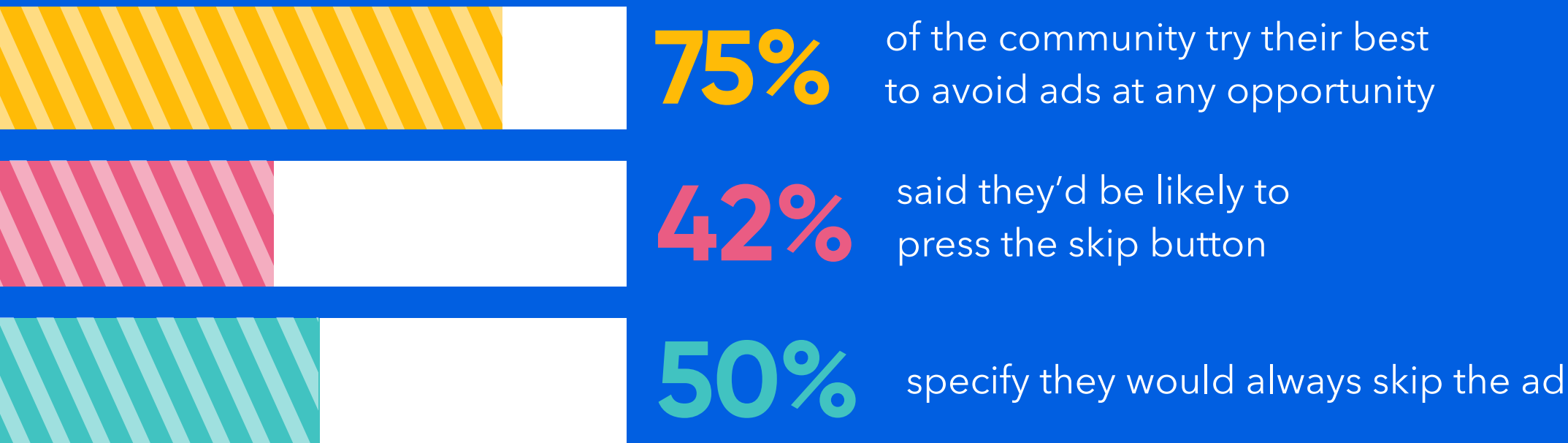
The worst offender was pop-up ads, according to 77%. This was closely followed by social media ads, with the community telling us they have to sift through paid endorsements and sponsored posts to see what your friends are doing. Third came TV ads. This exchange of time, data, and attention for access to entertainment and information is at the root of the friction. TV, radio, podcast, social media, and pop up ads all had a highly negative response rate - whereas billboards and print ads where rated as inoffensive comparatively. An ad that actively interrupts your activity or absorption of stimuli is more of an offense than a static ad on the side of the road or on a page. It is your choice to ignore a picture on the page of the magazine you're reading, but being forced to watch an ad in order to access a video or news article was met with a sense of powerlessness.

Of course, when demanding consumer attention is the end goal, advertising without annoying is like walking a tightrope. As mentioned earlier, 3 quarters of the community make a concerted effort to ignore ads - and 63% have an ad blocker. Similarly, 1 in 3 'always' occupy themselves with another task when TV ads come on, with 62% voting for 'sometimes'. 72% will likely check their phone when adverts come on, 71% head out of the room to the bathroom or to top up their water, and 36% change the channel or mute the TV. Marketers must balance the patience and goodwill of their audiences with a memorable message that sticks - and this is no easy feat in a world of ad blockers and skip buttons. When attempts to capture attention and mesmerise your target audience are falling flat, is it time to look to alternative routes of marketing?

3 Quarters of the community make a concerted effort to ignore ads

75% of the community try their best to avoid ads at any opportunity

42% said they'd be likely to press the skip button

50% specify they would always skip the ad

"Advertising will die out." Iain, Male, 60

"I hate advertising. Try to sell me something I don't need. Why? For what gain? Profit! Buy what you really need." – Walt, Male, 70

"Ads will go the way of the dodo because they will become non relevant. People skip commercials, block YouTube ads, block internet advertising and so never see most of these ads." - Daniel, Male, 49

Advertainment

Blurring boundaries between entertainment and advertising

With half of the community voting that the metaverse will be the next frontier for marketing, and **43% agreeing that gaming is a level up for advertising,** the world of advertising is on the brink of a full transition into advertainment.

When the lines between advertising and entertainment are blurred, two things happen. **One: you achieve what Craig Davis advises - you become what the consumer is interested in rather than interrupting what they're interested in. Two: you overcome the resistance that customers have towards being sold to.**

This obfuscation of boundaries between media and marketing has been practiced for some time via product placement in movies. These are ads you can't skip or mute. Fossen, writing for The Conversation, says: "In "The Variant," an episode from the Disney+ hit streaming show "Loki," it's tough to miss the barrage of product placements, with fast-paced action and dialogue taking place in front of Charmin toilet paper, Dove soap and Arm & Hammer deodorant. At one point, Loki barrels down an aisle with vacuum cleaners and fights off an opponent with a corded vacuum while iRobot vacuums are prominently featured on the shelf.
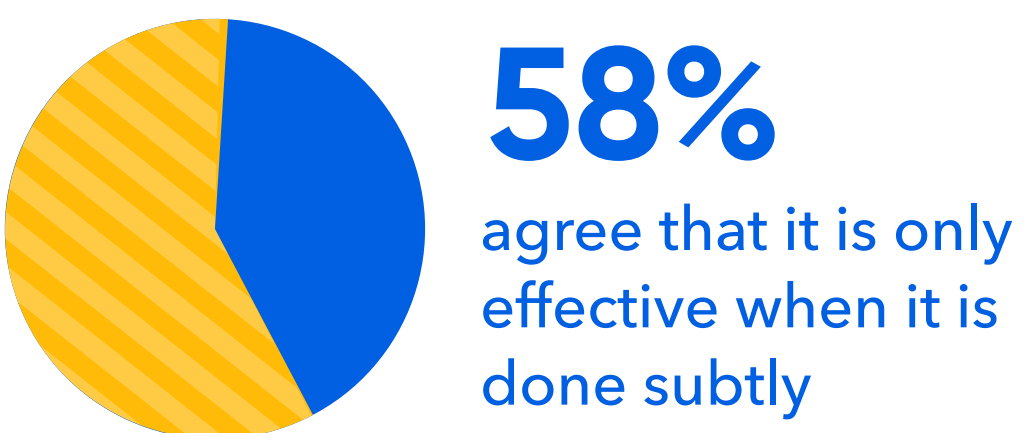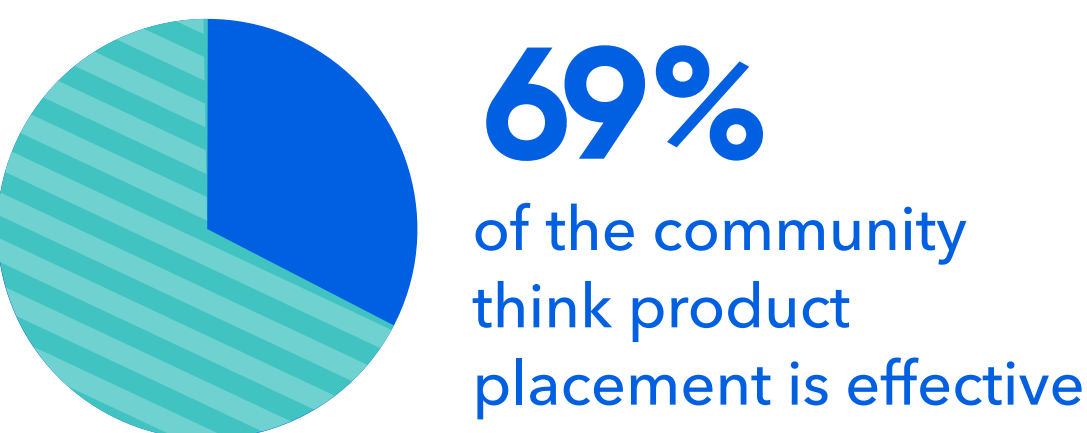
50%

Half of the community vote that the metaverse will be the next frontier for marketing

BULBSHARE

ADVERTAINMENT

"With Reese's Pieces making quite the integral appearance in E.T., Wilson playing best supporting act in Castaway, and TicTacs being passed around in Home Alone, product placement has an established place in mainstream film.

Fossen continues, "While many product placements are the result of such paid relationships, some product placements happen because of creative decisions, such as a writer wanting a character to wear Gucci to convey the character's affluence. Viewers aren't typically given information to distinguish between paid and unpaid product placements."

This style of advertising may not be new - it goes back to even the 30s - but it is sticking around for the future. When done in a way that isn't painfully obvious or cringeworthy, it can promote a brand and its values through powerful subliminal messaging.

69%
of the community think product placement is effective

58%
agree that it is only effective when it is done subtly

"I do think advertising is going to be on the internet more than anywhere else and the new metaverse is going to be as well." - Jennifer, Female, 39

60% say that influencer marketing replaced normal adverts

03 The dawn and dusk of influencer marketing: Expired trust

Though product placement is age-old, this transition to advertainment accelerated with the rise of the influencer. Consumers are now voluntarily watching ads.

YouTubers intwine brand messaging into entertaining videos, soothing the resistance towards being obviously sold to. Hence, **60% say that influencer marketing replaced normal adverts - and 66% think sponsored influencer content muddies the waters between advertising and entertainment.**

Of course, this blurring is one that many consumers resist, with fears of an Orwellian appropriation of art and entertainment. In fact...

84% of our insight community say they have lost trust in influencers.

INFLUENCER MARKETING

Once upon a time, when Instagram was in its infancy, the dark arts of influencer marketing were a trade secret. Now, the cat is out of the bag. Gen Z are increasingly sceptical about the transactional relationships that define influencer culture and are wising up to warning signs of inauthenticity: #ad, #sponsored, #prpackage. No longer are users fooled by promises of an aspirational life that will transpire at the click of the affiliate link.

As we've established, when consumers become aware of the tactics used to vy for their money and attention, they become resentful.

"No, I follow my own thoughts and feelings" Bulbshare user, Female, 47

"No I don't really trust them, I think they are only promoting things because they make money or commission from them." Bulbshare user, Female, 23

"No, I like to listen to their thoughts, but never trust them blindly, because they are doing business." Bulbshare user, Male, 36

"I don't... what they are peddling might look good, but comments usually tell a different story." Bulbshare user, Female, 28

"Self obsessed and untrustworthy individuals who have nothing to do with me." Bulbshare user, Female, 24

"They are good at what they do, but their ultimate goal is to make money from speaking about topics or selling me something. I don't put too much weight into what they say." Bulbshare user, Male, 18

"As long as they are being paid they will promote anything." Bulbshare user, Female, 32

"I don't trust influencers that much because they can be bought over." Bulbshare user, Male, 22

Advocacy and authenticity: A snowball effect in marketing

The next frontier, then, is no longer paid endorsements but genuine, authentic recommendations from real people. 86% would be more inclined to buy a product recommended by a friend than a paid influencer.

An army of advocates promoting your product with real fervour is a snowball effect that will go further than any ad. As Facebook's Maloire Lucich says, "People share, read and generally engage more with any type of content when it's surfaced through friends and people they know and trust."

Interestingly, when we asked how the community occupy themselves during a commercial break, half said they chat with their friends or family who they're watching with. And when 66% are more likely to buy a product recommended by their relations over that which has been advertised to them, clearly word of mouth advocacy is the solution to a switched off audience. It comes as no surprise in this post-ad world that 81% trust real opinions over those promoted via an advert.

Authenticity never gets old. Quality never gets old. And when your customers are genuinely excited by your product, they will tell their network about it with a passion that can't be faked. 74% would promote a product they genuinely care about online. Moreover, 88% are enthusiastic about collaborating with brands and 76% said they enjoy reviewing products.

86%
would be more inclined to buy a product recommended by a friend than a paid influencer

ADVOCACY

When the average consumer has such capacity to become a brand ambassador, it leaves a question mark over the future of paid influencer marketing. With authentic, trusted, unendorsed voices shouting about your brand in customer communities and beyond, there is little need to resort to paid opinion.

And advocacy is as beneficial to brands as it is to consumers: according to a recent study by CMX Research, 85% of brands believe building their own online communities is a direct route to improving brand experiences and fostering consumer trust. These customer communities don't just act as feedback loops for brands, but can be utilised for advocacy and brand promotion – with the inherent benefit of peer-to-peer authenticity, as opposed to paid promotion via influencers.

As Forbes says, "Loyalty—consistent customers who make repeat purchases—is a great thing to achieve. Every company is thrilled to win the steady revenue that loyal customers provide. But loyalty has its limits. It doesn't spread exponentially. It's not as if every loyal Starbucks customer is out there evangelizing about their coffee experience.[...] Advocacy is different. When clients become advocates, they're out there promoting us on their own. They're not waiting for us. [...] Perhaps, for example, you hear that a colleague is considering pursuing a certain type of consulting service, and you tell them, "You might want to try Firm A because we had a great experience with them." Again, no one asked you to do that, you just did it on your own—when the opportunity arose."

www.forbes.com/sites/forbesmarketplace/2022/02/08/from-loyalty-to-advocacy-the-key-to-effective-customer-experience/?sh=3acdb9407393

Like Forbes says, achieving advocacy is empowering the customer to do your job for you. We've seen traditional advertising. We've even seen advertainment. Now, we're stepping into new possibilities. Forget TV, billboards, podcasts, social media - the next conduit of your brand message is your customer.

"I am a firm believer in word of mouth advertisement." – Taynelle, Female, 45

"I think gone are the days when you see the latest film's advertising on bus stops." – Alison, Female, 49

"I never take notice of influencers at all and prefer to make my own purchase decisions or recommendations from family." Bulbshare user, Male, 25

"To me, brand advocacy is having a great feeling about a brand because of who they are and sharing that with others." Bulbshare user, Female, 30
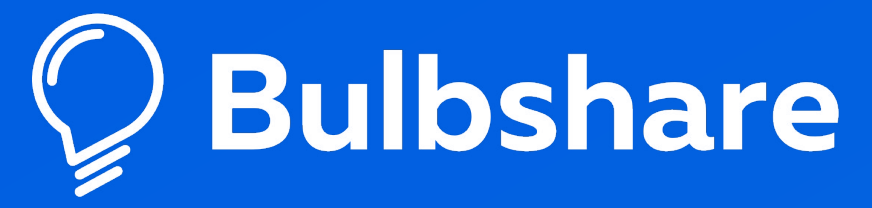
Bulbshare

To unlock more insights, reports, and trend forecasting, visit

RESOURCES.BULBSHARE.COM