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Losing control: The effects of social media fatigue, privacy concerns and psychological reactance on social media advertising*

Kontrolü kaybetmek: Sosyal medya yorgunluğunun, gizlilik endişelerinin ve psikolojik tepkinin sosyal medya reklamcılığına etkileri

Nathalie NICOLA[1]

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[1]Master Student, University of Central Lancashire, Lancashire School of Business and Enterprise, Luxembourg.

ORCID: N.N. 0000-0002-1120-037X

Corresponding author/Sorumlu yazar:
Nathalie Nicola, University of Central Lancashire, School of Business and Enterprise, Luxembourg
E-mail/E-posta:
nathalie-nicola@hotmail.com

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Abstract

The past decade has seen rising concerns about data privacy on social media platforms (SMP). Recent research (Huo, Liu & Min, 2021; Dodoo & Wen, 2020; Youn & Kim, 2019b), has suggested a growing interest in social media fatigue (SMF), whose novelty makes it challenging to understand the underlying issues faced by users of SMP. The present study analyses the impact of SMF on social media advertising (SMA) to discover reasons for reactance and advertising avoidance. This qualitative study consisted of twelve in-depth interviews with young adults aged between 23 and 31 years. The results indicate high levels of SMF, which mainly stemmed from information overload and being overwhelmed. This caused users to feel negatively after using SMP. Ad avoidance is caused by significant privacy concerns when encountering personalized ads, such as suspicion as to how data is used, the feeling of being watched and listened to, as well as annoyance at the irrelevance and repetitiveness of SMA. Furthermore, participants indicated a lack of control over their privacy online and that they felt bombarded by too many ads.
Keywords: Social media fatigue, social media advertising, advertising avoidance, social media advertising reactance, privacy

Öz

Son on yılda sosyal medya platformlarındaki (SMP) veri gizliliği konusunda endişelerin arttığı görülmektedir. Son araştırmalar (Huo, Liu & Min, 2021; Dodoo & Wen, 2020; Youn & Kim, 2019b) sosyal medya platformlarını kullananların karşılaştığı temel problemleri anlamayı zorlaştıran sosyal medya yorgunluğuna (SMY) artan bir ilginin olduğunu göstermiştir. Bu çalışma, tepki ve reklamdan kaçınma nedenlerini ortaya koymak adına SMY'nin sosyal medya reklamcılığı (SMR) üzerindeki etkisini analiz etmektedir. Bu çalışmada, nitel araştırma yöntemi

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kullanilarak, yaşları 23-31 yaşları arasında değişen genç yetişkinlerle on iki derinlemesine görüşme yapılmıştır. Sonuçlar, sosyal medyada maruz kalınan aşırı bilgi yüklemesinden ve bunalmaktan kaynaklanan yüksek SMY düzeylerini kanıtlamaktadır. Reklamdan kaçınmanın temel nedeni, kişiselleştirilmiş reklamlarla karşılaşıldığında verilerin nasıl kullanıldığına dair kuşku, başkaları tarafından izleniyor ve dinleniyormuş hissi ve SMR'nın alakasızlığı ve üst üste tekrarlanmasından duyulan rahatsızlık gibi önemli gizlilik kaygılarından kaynaklanmaktadır. Ayrıca, katılımcılar çevrimiçi gizlilikleri üzerinde kontrol sahibi olmadıklarını ve çok fazla reklam bombardımanına tutulduklarını hissettiklerini belirtmişlerdir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Sosyal medya yorgunluğu, sosyal medya reklamcılığı, reklamdan kaçınma, sosyal medya reklam tepkisi, gizlilik

Introduction

Consumers are using SMP daily to share, engage, and consume content, which has caused brands and advertisers to benefit from the possibilities to reach new audiences and target specific demographics (Ashley & Tuten, 2015). Yet, recent years have shown that the availability of these platforms to billions of people worldwide has caused an excessive amount of content, which includes advertisements from different brands and companies. Users initially enjoyed this diversity and found it interesting, before privacy concerns caused by data leaks. This concern forced the users to question how their data is gathered and used (Swinhoe, 2021). These concerns and the excessive amount of information on SMP have caused SMF and the consumers reassessment of their attitudes toward these platforms (Dhir et al., 2018).

The emergence of this recent phenomenon has prompted scholars to examine its triggers and effects in prior research, to find the antecedents of SMF as: information overload (e.g. Whelan, Najmul Islam & Brooks, 2020; Ramadan, 2017; Dai, Ali & Wang, 2020), privacy concerns (e.g. Bright, Lim & Logan, 2021, Baek & Morimoto, 2012, Youn & Kim, 2019b), and fear of missing out (e.g. Dhir et al., 2018; Tandon et al., 2021; Bright & Logan, 2018). In addition, the results of SMF have been identified as advertising avoidance (e.g., Dai, Ali & Wang, 2020; Youn & Kim, 2019a & 2019b; Dodoo & Wen, 2020), psychological reactance (e.g., Baek & Morimoto, 2012; Youn & Kim, 2019a & 2019b; Reynolds-Tylus, Bigsby & Quick, 2020), and changes in media use (e.g. Bright, Lim & Logan, 2021; Ravindran, Chua & Goh, 2014; van der Goot et al., 2018). This has caused contradictory behaviors and attitudes among social media users, as they become more distrustful about data mining yet cannot stop using SMP and search engines because of their practicality.

Huo, Liu and Min (2021) have developed the first social media advertising reactance model of its kind based on previous literature. This model encompasses the structural factors of social media advertising, the reactance towards social media ads, and finally, the users' responses, categorized into cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses, of which SMF is a cognitive response. Scholars have called for research on unexplored aspects and causes of SMF. This study explores previously found aspects of SMF while taking a qualitative approach to learn the underlying motivations and attitudes. The findings indicate that while privacy concerns play a minor role in SMF, a significant concern deals with the attitudes towards social media advertising. Furthermore, an unexplored link has been found between the behavioral response of blocking, hiding, or reporting ads and the subsequent reactance, avoidance, and fatigue. The current study thus contributes to a better understanding of social media fatigue and its antecedents as well as the reactance and ad avoidance of SMP users.

The importance of understanding the impact of SMF on social media advertising is manifold. With social media users becoming more aware of how their data is used, they tend to ignore ads as a reactance mechanism. The various techniques employed by social media users were analyzed in this study and have shown only to cause further fatigue, as users feel that they have lost all control and can only protect themselves by actively ignoring ads through actions such as looking away, muting the ad, scrolling faster, or even discontinuing usage. Previous studies (e.g., Kim, 2015) have found a difference in attitudes present if users perceive an ad as relevant and valuable, which is also confirmed by the present study. This signifies then that social media advertising must change in order to not lose control over the persuasion potential of this marketing tool.

This study takes a qualitative approach with 12 in-depth interviews and identify the impact of SMF on SMP users. It does so through exploring the attitudes of SMP users towards social media and SMA, the underlying causes for their SMF and SMA reactance.

The social media landscape

Social media allows users to create and exchange content, called user-generated content (UGC) (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010) and is critical for the online communications of every business sector. SMP allow brands to interact with different audiences and

target them individually (Ashley & Tuten, 2015; Humphrey, Laverie & Rinaldo, 2015) to drive engagement and build brand relationships (Voorveld et al., 2018).

Social media platforms

SMP remain relatively novel. The major player in this space, Facebook, only dates back to 2004, making it the oldest SMP of the globally popular apps. YouTube is not far behind, launched in 2005. Instagram, in this case, is the youngest platform of the global leaders, launched in 2010 and quickly growing into a top competitor, with over one billion active monthly users in 2021. Other widespread SMP include TikTok, Snapchat, and Twitter.

Despite the steadily rising number of users on SMP, the usage of SMP began to stagnate in 2017 (Statista, 2020). The average time spent daily on SMP soared from 90 to 134 minutes from 2012 to 2017 but has since only risen to 145 minutes in 2019 and 2020. This stagnation can then be seen a result of SMP users experiencing fatigue due to overly extensive usage of SMP (Bright & Logan, 2018).

Social media fatigue

In the context of SMP, a widely used definition of fatigue is provided by Techopedia (2011), stating that SMF leads users to pull back from SMP because they feel overwhelmed, are bored, and/or concerned about their online privacy. Other scholars (e.g., Dai, Ali & Wang, 2020; Whelan, et al., 2020; Dhir et al., 2018) have based their research on the definition provided by Ravindran, Chua & Goh (2014, p. 2317):

> Social network fatigue may be defined as a subjective, multidimensional user experience comprising feelings such as tiredness, annoyance, anger, disappointment, guardedness, loss of interest, or reduced need/motivation associated with various aspects of social network use and interactions.

Based on these definitions, it can be assumed that SMF is experienced when SMP users feel overwhelmed by SMP interactions, are bored, exhausted, tired, or angry, due to such issues as privacy concerns or an overload of communication, technology, and/or information. Here, it is essential to note that this general definition does not consider the various factors influencing SMF and its severity, such as user- and social media-related factors (Dai, Ali & Wang, 2020).

SMF and information overload

Information overload has been an issue for many years. On SMP, users face different expressions of this phenomenon, such as connection, social, and system feature overload (Whelan, Najmul Islam & Brooks, 2020). Bright & Logan (2018) have conducted a study concerning SMF and the user's attitudes towards SMP advertising, finding that the immense amount of information available is overwhelming for SMP users and causes them to experience SMF, which was confirmed by Whelan, Najmul Islam & Brooks (2020), who furthermore established that boredom, as well as communication overload, were additional causes for SMF, especially when users turn to SMP to escape boredom. Comparably, Dai, Ali & Wang (2020) further revealed that this causes fatigue, frustration, and dissatisfaction, leading consumers to intentionally avoid information on SMP.

SMF and privacy concerns

Bright, Lim, and Logan (2021) found that privacy concerns are another cause for experiencing SMF. Privacy concerns are prevalent in the 21st Century, as consumers are becoming more aware of how their data is gathered and used, especially when considering the many recent data leaks and breaches that have affected millions of users worldwide (Swinhoe, 2021) (e.g., Facebook Cambridge Analytica 2018 (Browne, 2018), including the Facebook data leak of 2021 (Holmes, 2021).

These findings confirm that information overload and privacy concerns are the primary triggers for SMF and cause frustration and dissatisfaction, possibly leading to information and advertising avoidance as a defense mechanism.

Social media advertising

Online advertising is the principal medium used by commercial entities for their marketing communications (Statista, 2021b). Recent SMA trends show that marketers rely heavily on the persuasiveness of native ads. SMA differs from traditional advertising because it is an interactive and collaborative form of communication. With SMP being sites for online social networking at their cores, consumers have the ability to contribute to the online image of a brand as much as the brand itself.

Native advertising: Platform, information format and quality

SMA is based on the interaction between users and advertisers. Its success then depends on SMP users engaging with the ad, through liking, sharing, or commenting. Native advertising imitates the look and feel of non-sponsored content on a platform (Youn & Kim, 2019b), making it generally non-intrusive, but it can also be covert, manipulative, and misleading (Kim, 2015). The information format and quality are the main influences on how a user perceives the information. With SMA, the social value becomes a central factor. Social value can be defined as "the degree to which users perceive a closeness with an advertisement and easily exchange information about it with acquaintances" (Huo, Liu & Min, 2021, p. 829). This perception, however, is wholly dependent on the users' experiences; if the ad appears too personalized, the user can react negatively and avoid the ad, but if it is perceived as relevant, it becomes non-intrusive and has a positive influence (Kim, 2015; Baek & Morimoto, 2012).

With native advertising, aspects of a specific platform which influence the user need to be considered. Kim (2015) found that on the video platform YouTube, skippable ads and non-skippable ads had a similar impact on reactance towards the ad; both pre- and mid-roll ads showed high ad avoidance and negative attitudes if they were not perceived as relevant. Youn and Kim (2019b) found that on Facebook, native advertising is often perceived as more intrusive because its covert nature forces users to look at it. Even so, personalized native ads are still considered positive for the most part, if they are perceived as informative, entertaining, and/or feature a special offer (Youn & Kim, 2019b).

Advertising avoidance

Advertising avoidance was explored in 1997 by Speck and Elliott (1997) in relation to traditional media, who defined ad avoidance as "all actions by media users that differentially reduce their exposure to ad content" (p.61), which then included switching TV or radio channels, leaving the room to avoid seeing ads, and flipping through pages of print publications. Their findings concluded that demographic variables, media-related variables, and communication problems were other predictors of ad avoidance. Similarly, Rojas-Méndez, Davies and Madran (2009) also found that demographic variables had the most influence on behavioral avoidance, while attitudinal variables impacted mechanical avoidance.

Intrusiveness, invasiveness and goal impediment

Ad avoidance is dependent on the individuals' situations (both demographic and attitudinal) and personality. Several studies have dived further into this and have examined the impact of psychological reactance (Baek & Morimoto, 2012), personality traits (Dodoo & Wen, 2020), as well as psychological ownership (Niu, Wang & Liu, 2021). Baek and Morimoto (2012) found that privacy concerns and ad irritation are causes for ad avoidance and ad skepticism. Comparably, Niu, Wang, and Liu (2021) found that advertising irritation depends on attention and space invasiveness and is the leading cause for ad avoidance. Finally, Dodoo and Wen (2020) found that ad intrusiveness and privacy concerns are causes for ad avoidance, especially when the consumer has high levels of conscientiousness and/or neuroticism.

Ads as disruptions, or interruptions, are often discussed as the cause for consumers reacting negatively or showing resistance as psychological reactance and, as a defense mechanism, start to avoid the ad by doing something else or actively ignoring it (Edwards, Li & Lee, 2013; Speck & Elliott, 1997; Niu, Wang & Liu, 2021). To illustrate this, Cho and Cheon (2004) have established an ad avoidance model, based on cognition, affect, and behavior, which shows that ad avoidance derives from ad clutter, which can lead to ad irritation, prior negative experiences, such as dissatisfaction, lack of utility or incentive, and finally, the most significant antecedent, perceived goal impediment, such as through distractions or disruptions.

The negative attitudes developed by consumers due to ad clutter, intrusiveness, and invasiveness then motivate marketers to create more persuasive ads, which can end up in consumers feeling bombarded with ads, wanting to ignore them even more. This can bring about such statements as, "People hate advertising," from Joanna Coles, former CCO of Hearst Magazines, or Marc Pritchard, CBO at P&G, saying that ads are too often irrelevant, "just silly, ridiculous, or stupid" (Hsu, 2019).

These findings apply to all ads that are perceived as intrusive and invasive by being perceived as too personalized, excessive, raising privacy concerns, taking up space on personalized feeds, and representing an obstacle.

Privacy and control

The occurrence of ad avoidance is further underlined by the use of ad-blocking software (ABS). As consumers are overwhelmed with the information available online and find themselves lost in ad clutter which impedes their goals, ABS become a way for them to regain their freedom and control. In 2021, 42.7% of internet users worldwide have opted for ABS, while 22.3% use it because there are too many ads which they find annoying and irrelevant (Cooper, 2021; Dean, 2021). This systematic avoidance of ads can cause additional ad irritation, especially on SMP, where ABS doesn't work, resulting in further SMF.

In addition to ABS, many users have turned to a Virtual Private Network (VPN) to regain control against unwanted ads and unauthorized data sharing.

The need for data privacy and control becomes apparent when considering that 43% of internet users feel they have no control over their data and 33% fear they cannot control how companies collect their data (McAfee, 2018). Thus, over 31% of internet users rely on their VPN to keep them safe online. This has not gone unnoticed by tech companies; in 2021, Apple rolled out a software update for its flagship iPhone which disallows Apps from tracking actions and therefore prohibits personalized, or targeted, ads, a decision that caused a lot of unease for marketers but was seen as a step in the right direction for transparency in data collection.

Psychological reactance

In 1966, Jack W. Brehm introduced the psychological reactance theory (PRT), a concept about freedom, control, and reactance, mainly investigating how individuals react towards restricted autonomy (Brehm & Brehm, 1981; Lessne & Vekatesan, 1989; Youn & Kim, 2019a). While the PRT has been chiefly researched in the field of health communication (e.g., Gardner & Leshner, 2015; Dillard & Shen, 2007; Slavin & Earleywine, 2019; Kim et al., 2021), recent studies have found that it can be applied to online ads more generally (e.g., Youn & Kim, 2019a; Edwards, Li & Lee, 2002; Baek & Morimoto, 2012; Youn & Kim, 2019b; Wojdynski & Evans, 2019; Huang, 2019).

Dillard and Shen (2005) have found that PRT can be applied to measure negative perceptions experienced by consumers when presented with commercial messages,

such as their articulations "of hostile and aggressive feelings" (p.146). These feelings present themselves as the reasons why consumers seek to restore their freedom of choice by avoiding ads, which characterize the threat to their freedom. This avoidance as a result of reactance was defined by Baek and Morimoto (2012) as "the affective and motivational sides of resistance to persuasion" (p.61), wherein ads then exhibit forced exposure, against which consumers use their defense mechanism to avoid them and not be interrupted (Edwards, Li & Lee, 2013).

Irritation and annoyance

PRT can prove that forcing consumers to see ads has inevitably negatively affected their attitudes and is positively related to ad avoidance, as consumers become irritated and defensive. Yet, Edwards, Li, and Lee (2013) have also established that not all forced exposure is bad, meaning that the level of reactance, here irritation and avoidance, depends wholly on the ad's level of intrusiveness and relevance. The topic of ad intrusiveness and relevance ties in with ads that appear to be too personalized, which can trigger reactance as consumers are suspicious of their privacy and data being shared and feel invaded, often even observed, by advertisers and/or third parties (Baek & Morimoto, 2012), which results in them feeling annoyed and irritated by the presented information.

Social media advertising reactance

Huo, Liu and Min (2021) have recently developed a social media advertising reactance model (SMARM) (figure 1), which reflects the relationship between PRT, and ad avoidance reasons discussed previously, namely "intrusiveness, invasiveness, goal impediment, irritation, and annoyance" (p. 828).

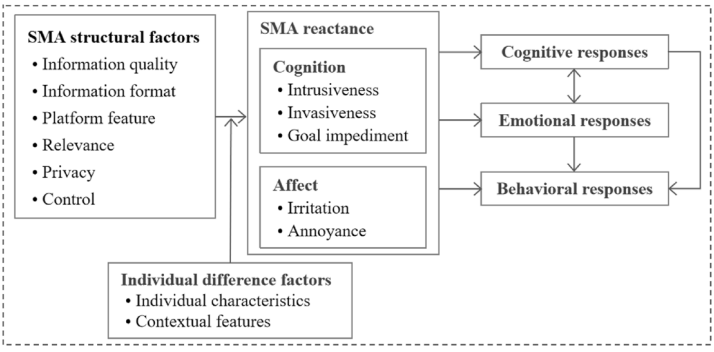


Figure 1: Social media advertising reactance model (Huo, Liu & Min, 2021, p. 829)

This model provides an excellent overview of the antecedents of SMP users resisting persuasion and experiencing reactance while being in accordance with previous studies' findings. It is also in accordance with the present study's research regarding the cognitive, behavioral, and affective responses to SMA, in addition to the structural factors listed (e.g. Baek & Morimoto, 2012; Dodoo & Wen, 2020; Niu, Wang & Liu, 2021; Kelly, Kerr & Drennan, 2013). The model also supports SMF as a cognitive response, or consequence for platforms, to SMAR.

The SMAR consequences listed are divided into three responses: (1) cognitive, (2) emotional, and (3) behavioral. The first can be further divided into: cognitive avoidance, ad scepticism, and SMF. The second relates to affective avoidance. The third indicates behavioral avoidance, lack of memory, and discontinued usage (Huo, Liu & Min, 2021, p. 834). All three responses are a consequence of PRT, which is a consequence of SMF, and therefore, SMARM represents a coherent synopsis of their relationship, about which research remains in its early stages.

Aim and Methodology

Aim

This study aims to analyze the phenomenon of Social Media Fatigue (SMF) and its impact on SMA. The objectives are to confirm previous findings of this topic and possibly find new antecedents of SMF to finally contribute to the overall understanding of this novel experience, of which research is still ongoing and in its early stages.

The research question of this study is then: "What is the impact of SMF on SMP users?", which can only be answered by first asking three sub-questions:

RQ1: What are the SMP users' attitudes towards SM and SMA?

RQ2: Why are SMP users experiencing SMF?

RQ3: How are SMP users experiencing SMA reactance?

Methodology

SMF and SMAR are relatively under-researched topics, with new studies continuously emerging (e.g., Zhang et al., 2021; Huo, Liu & Min, 2021; Bright, Lim & Logan, 2021), making the present study exploratory. Exploratory research aims to provide insight into fundamental issues to support future research (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). To uncover these ideas and insights, this study took a qualitative approach with in-depth interviews.

For the epistemological approach, interpretivism was chosen due to it being the most useful for this study, as it aims to understand the impact of media texts, such as SMA messages, on media audiences, in this case, SMP users, wherein the understanding of these factors should explain the levels of SMF experienced.

Through convenience sampling, 12 participants were chosen for this study, which should be ideal, as 12 is a good sample for students' theses and dissertations (Baker & Edwards, 2012), and the minimum sample for qualitative studies (Fugard & Potts, 2015; Vasileiou et al., 2018). Participants were chosen through a non-probability method of sampling and based on their usage of SMP, age (ranging from 23 to 31), and gender (six female and six male). Participants were either friends or were recruited through friends. This makes the sample not representative of the entire population and therefore, the findings cannot be generalized for other samples.

Table 1: Demographic variables of participants

Variables		n	%
Gender	Female	6	50
	Male	6	50
Age	23 - 26	7	58.3
	27 - 31	5	41.7

The interview questions which guided the interviews were adapted from previous, peer-reviewed studies to increase this study's reliability and validity levels. In addition, the chosen questions stemmed from quantitative studies and were adjusted to eliminate ambiguity and any leading language. The adapted interview questions, in order of their sources, are presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Adapted interview questions

Question	Source (adapted from)
How do you feel about ads on social media? What do you do when you see SMA? Do you click on SMA? Why? Why not? How do you deal with personalized ads? Do you use ABS? Do you hide ads from your SM feed? Why? Did you unfollow brands on SM? Why? Why not? What actions do you do to avoid targeted ads? How do you deal with cookies? Do you want sponsored ads on your SM feed? Why? Why not? How do you feel about your privacy on SM? For example, when you see personalized SM ads? Do you feel you can protect your privacy on SMP? Did you change your privacy settings?	Dodoo & Wen, 2020
How do you feel towards personalized ads? Do you think you receive irrelevant ads/of no interest for you personally? Do you think companies share your information without your permission or knowledge? How do you feel about this?	Baek & Morimoto, 2012
How do you feel after using SM for a while? What do you do about the excessive amount of information on SM?	Whelan, Najmul Islam & Brooks, 2020
Do you feel that your SM usage can be monitored easily by companies for commercial reasons?	Kang, Zhang & Yoo, 2020
How do you feel when you realize that SM has taken up too much of your time?	Zhang et al., 2021

These interview questions were then put in a logical order and were complemented with general questions about SMP usage and SMA.

In qualitative research, physical artifacts, such as words from interview transcripts, are analyzed as data to find underlying concepts and move towards generalization and categorize the data into broader trends and themes (Neuman, 2014). The interviews of this study were recorded as Memos on an iPhone (which was the least intrusive), before being transcribed into single interviews and finally coded. They were then analyzed thematically based on previous literature and findings (SMAR, SMF and PRT). Each interview lasted between 30 to 60 minutes and had accompanying hand-written notes, which were taken during the interview, which was then transcribed quickly after.

Qualitative research has many different approaches, which makes it more diverse than quantitative research. There is no agreed upon way to assess its quality, as it "will rely largely on subjective judgment" (Dixon-Woods et al., 2004, p. 223). Chesebro and Borisoff (2007) and Kumar (2011) have developed a few criteria to help assess the quality during and after the research; these include, but are not limited to, the factors affecting the gathering of the data, the setting, and the nature of interaction. Careful attention was paid to these factors for the present study.

Ethical considerations can emerge due to qualitative researchers engaging with their subjects directly, which can often lead to subjects revealing personal details about their lives. To overcome these issues, participants were first asked for informal consent to participate in the study and then, prior to the interview itself, were presented with an Interview Consent Form.

Findings

This study has considered different theories relating to SMF, Ad Avoidance, and PRT and has found that the leading causes for SMF are information overload and privacy concerns. The reasons for Ad Avoidance were described as the covert nature of native advertising as well as the platform's information and format quality and control over privacy. Finally, PRT was described as "the affective and motivational sides of resistance to persuasion" (Baek & Morimoto, 2012, p. 61) and resulted in SMP users feeling irritated and annoyed. These three concepts correlate to explain why and how SMP users are suffering from SMF and its result.

The main research question was: "What is the impact of SMF on SMP users?" The findings indicate that SMP users suffer from SMF and, as a result, react negatively towards SMA, trying to ignore it whenever possible unless it proves relevant and valuable to them. Although the results aligned with previous studies, not all the theories were fully supported. The impact of privacy concerns on SMF and the effect of control over privacy on ad avoidance proved to be only partially supported, as not enough participants have reflected on these.

The results are summarized in Table 3 to provide an overview of the theories and their related results.

Table 3: Findings and results

Theory	Authors	Findings (n=12)	Supported
SMF + Information Overload	Whelan, Najmul Islam & Brooks, 2020; Bright & Logan, 2018; Dai, Ali & Wang, 2020	- waste of time (10), for entertainment when bored (10), stay in touch, see what others are doing (7). - bombarded by ads (8) - feel bad (6), stressed (5), exhausted (3), irritated (3), guilty (2) - annoyed and overwhelmed by information (12)	Yes
SMF + Privacy Concerns	Bright, Lim & Logan, 2021	- feel watched and listened to (5) - no privacy online, no control (12)	Partly
Ad Avoidance: Native Advertising	Kim, 2015; Huo, Liu & Min, 2021; Baek & Morimoto, 2012	- YouTube ads are most annoying because irrelevant & repetitive - had bought from an ad because of its relevance (5) - feeling rage towards native ads because of covert nature (2)	Yes
Ad Avoidance: Intrusiveness, Invasiveness, Goal Impediment	Baek & Morimoto, 2012; Niu, Wang & Liu, 2021; Dodoo & Wen, 2020; Edwards, Li & Lee, 2013; Cho & Cheon, 2004	- SMA is annoying (9), scary and creepy (6), irrelevant (8), repetitive (4). - hate ads (3), bombarded by ads (8) - focus only on 'skip ad'-button (4) - scroll faster when ad in newsfeed (5), scroll away normally (12) - look away (10), do something else (4), switch the video (4)	Yes
Ad Avoidance: Privacy + Control	Cooper, 2021; Dean, 2021	- use ABS (5)	Partly
PRT: Irritation + Annoyance	Brehm & Brehm, 1981; Lessne & Vekatesan, 1989; Youn & Kim, 2019a; Dillard & Shen, 2005; Baek & Morimoto, 2012; Edwards, Li & Lee, 2013	- have unfollowed a brand/person before (10) - have blocked/reported an ad before (7) - feel watched & listened to (5) - no privacy online, no control (12) - focus only on 'skip ad'-button (4) - scroll faster when ad in newsfeed (5), scroll away normally (12) - look away (10), do something else (4), switch the video (4)	Yes

Attitudes towards social media and SMA

Social Media: Scroll, Dislike, Distract, Repeat.

SMP are part of the participants' daily routines, which have turned into a chronic process that they often do not even realize they are doing. This is especially evident when participants describe that they do not enjoy the content they see most of the time, which creates an endless cycle of feeling bored, starting to scroll, seeing ads or irrelevant content, feeling bad about themselves for wasting time, and closing the SMP until they feel bored again.

Instagram has become popular for its visual appeal and ease of use, being described as having the "brain candy" effect. Although Instagram is a popular social media platform, many participants only occasionally post stories and rarely post overall. This is also reflected in their YouTube usage, where all subjects watch videos but do not engage in any way.

Although Facebook is the most-used platform worldwide, not all participants use it. Despite mentioning that it is full of irrelevant content, they have not discontinued usage because of specific uses, such as university groups, events, and the Facebook Marketplace. In addition, participants confirmed that their Facebook usage has significantly decreased because of other SMP.

Social media usage hours vary among all participants, ranging between one to six hours per day, with the most common timeframes being one to two and two to four hours. When asked about their emotional state after these timeframes, the responses were predominantly negative: bad, wasted time, stressed, exhausted, and irritated. Alternatively, the positive mentions were: feeling the same as before, inspired, and motivated. These responses were always given with the remark that the feelings depend on the type of content they have consumed. Comments included:

> A little like exhausted […,] sometimes I regret it because I think I could have done other things […] sometimes it's really negative…then you feel kind of sombre… but sometimes it's good when you're informing yourself. (Maria, 23)

> if I use social media to compare myself to others, then I feel miserable […], but if you use it like I often do for skating, for inspiration […] then you feel motivated […], but I also feel like when I watch videos for hours and hours for example then I'm just exhausted and drained, I'm tired and […] I'm also somehow irritated. (Mick, 28)

The evidence shows that participants have an overall negative attitude towards their SMP overdose usage. There were indications of participants feeling addicted to scrolling.

Social media advertising: Between relevance and surveillance

All participants stated that they avoid ads. The reasons for this were all in accordance with Kim (2015) and Baek and Morimoto (2012), who found that native ads can cause

avoidance because of their covert nature, which changes with the perception of the ad, ads that are too personalized cause an adverse reaction and therefore avoidance, and, finally, that YouTube ads caused high avoidance and negative attitudes when perceived as irrelevant.

Participants reported an overall deeply adverse attitude to SMA, expressing this with such words as: annoying, scary and creepy, irrelevant, and repetitive. Three participants have clearly stated that they hate ads. Participants have noted that they feel bombarded by ads, that there are just too many for them, which causes frustration and irritation:

> Annoying…especially on YouTube […] I understand it, and not everything can be free but…you don't have to exaggerate…especially when it's super stupid ads that are…like repetitive […] or when you google something like any product, and you receive those ads immediately everywhere that's stupid as well…(Emilio, 28)

While some participants stated they feel watched and listened to, which causes negative attitudes, they also react negatively when they believe the SMA algorithm has failed them. The fact that participants almost feel trapped between irrelevant ads and feeling monitored expresses their trouble assessing the value of different ads throughout the day. Mick (28) described his experience of SMA as walking into a shopping mall and immediately being pressured to spend money:

> It's like I walk into a mall every single day or into a shop and I look at where I can spend my money, […] nowadays I feel like everyone tries to snatch your money out of your pockets…and that's how it is with social media and where it is really frustrating (Mick, 28)

Others, however, described the value that SMA sometimes has for them. For example, participants mentioned that they had bought something from an ad because of its relevance. Thus, even though they have stated that they do not like SMA, they change their attitude when perceiving an ad as relevant and valuable. Elisa (24) commented: "I'm happy when they're relevant…but they're annoying me when they don't match […] I think they are cool, but I feel like they're not accurate."

This demonstrates that SMA can positively influence SMP users if the ad walks the very fine line between relevance and being too personalized.

Why are SMP users experiencing SMF?

Information overload: It's all muffled

It can be supposed that all participants suffer from SMF mainly due to information overload and proneness to boredom. This is supported with Bright and Logan's (2018) findings that the immense amount of information is overwhelming to SMP users and causes fatigue. It furthermore proves that boredom, information, and communication overload are other reasons for SMF, as found by Whelan, Najmul Islam, and Brooks (2020).

When asked about information available on SMP, all participants showed signs of information overload. This inability to process stems from SMP providing too much information, which makes participants feel like they wasted their time, bad, stressed, exhausted, irritated, and guilty.

> If I have a day like where I'm just on the couch, and I scroll the whole time, then at some point, I feel like I've scrolled, read and watched so much that I get a headache and then it's just too much. (Carlos, 23)

Some participants have explained how they felt so overwhelmed at one point that they had to delete the apps:

> Tired, more stressed, and I already had…uhm where I reached the point that I just turned everything off, so I deleted everything from my phone uhm like Apps and for a long…I really didn't use it for a long time. (Aurora, 23)

Participants further explained how information on SMP often feels repetitive and irrelevant, which makes them feel annoyed and overwhelmed. The amount of information was described by Mick (28) as: "Absolutely crazy. It's like you're spending your day in a room where there are 2,000 people permanently talking to you and you have to filter who you're listening to, and it drives you nuts."

Privacy concerns: Big brother is watching you

Bright, Lim, and Logan (2021) found that privacy concerns are another cause for SMF. Some participants have mentioned they feel watched and listened to, but this was mainly a result of PRT as it was mentioned only in tandem with SMA. The cause for this could be that, in a way, participants differentiate between SMA and SMP, in the sense of them, for example, enjoying platforms such as Instagram and YouTube for their content, but reporting ad avoidance and annoyance for ads. Participants have shown significant privacy concerns with ads, but not directly related to platforms. Therefore, the findings are consistent with Dodoo and Wen's (2020) findings that ad intrusiveness and privacy concerns are additional causes for avoidance.

All participants have specified that they feel like they either do not have any privacy online or are not in control of their privacy and data, as they believe their data is sold and their privacy is invaded. Some participants have shown awareness of giving their permission through terms of use and conditions, which they have all accepted at some point, without reading through them. Participants put part of blame on themselves for allowing their data to be mined and part of the blame on SMP because of items which were hidden in the extended versions of the terms they agreed to. The fact that participants feel this way yet have not stopped using SMP and search engines shows that, even though they have strong privacy concerns, they feel like they cannot control their privacy and data anymore, so they no longer trouble themselves with it. Another prominent issue participants described was their feeling of being listened to:

> I feel like if I talk to you and we talk about stuff like a food bowl for cats or dogs, after 5 minutes, because of voice recognition, we'll have an ad about that in our feeds […] these algorithms are active to monitor us and when somewhere someone says specific words or something then that goes into a central and then they listen to that. (Mick, 28)

These attitudes can be generally described as Brutus (29) had mentioned: "I…do have a begrudging acceptance of uh of the system how it is uh because I know that it's pay to play, so you pay with your data for the service you're using." This evidence shows that participants feel there is no escape for them; on the one hand, they cannot turn away from social media even though it exhausts them, and on the other hand,

they feel even more fatigued because their privacy is invaded, and they cannot do or look at anything online without being watched and listened to.

How are SMP users experiencing SMAR?

Advertising avoidance: Don't let the ad win!

Participants described "hostile and aggressive feelings" (Dillard & Shen, 2005, p. 146) upon seeing an ad, especially on YouTube, where they feel they are victims of forced ad exposure, making them resort to drastic measures to avoid them. All participants have noted that they scroll away when they see ads on their newsfeeds, except if they seem interesting. This is in accordance with Niu, Wang, and Liu (2021), who have found that advertising irritation depends on attention and space invasiveness and causes ad avoidance. Some participants have indicated that they scroll a little faster, as Elisa (24) described: "I look to see if it is relevant for me or if I'm currently in the mood for it […] if I like it, I click on it…uh but if not, then I just scroll away really fast."

All participants have shared the same opinion about YouTube ads being the most annoying and irrelevant. Furthermore, when asked about their actions upon seeing a YouTube ad, it became clear that they are willing to do almost anything to avoid these ads. Birillo (25) stated:

> A trick that I sometimes do that doesn't do anything though, is I close the video immediately, and then I restart it…then if there's another ad, I restart it again, which is quite stupid because if you look at it like if you restart your video three times, you'll spend more time with that than if you'd just watch the ad…I just don't want to watch it.

This shows that participants would rather spend time doing specific actions which annoy them than just wait for a few seconds until they can skip the ad. Mick (28) has found another way to avoid YouTube ads on his TV; he ignores them by starting to scroll on Instagram, until he sees an ad on there, which is when he turns back to YouTube to see if the ad on there is done.

This evidences that participants are using mechanisms to ignore ads by either looking away, by doing something else, or even wholly switching the video, really anything "just so that the ad doesn't win," in the words of Emilio (28).

Psychological reactance: Don't waste my time

Psychological reactance revealed itself in all the participants; they feel watched and listened to and therefore think SMA is scary and creepy. These findings are entirely in accordance with Baek and Morimoto's (2012) conclusions that ads that are too personalized can trigger reactance and make SMP users suspicious. Furthermore, participants have repeated several times that they think personalized ads are uncanny and that they are constantly being observed, listened to, and analyzed.

Psychological reactance was observed as a coping mechanism and revealed participants' emotions when they think their freedom is limited through ad exposure. For example, Gizmo (31) has noted that he feels "rage" towards native ads because they look like posts. This indicates the nature of reactance-related emotions, as participants feel ads disturb their newsfeeds and willingness to consume organic content on SMP. Additionally, participants had tried to block or report an ad before, which then proved to be of no use and made them give up. The reasons for these actions were mainly named as ad repetitiveness and irrelevance. Interestingly, the participants who attempted to block or report an ad before all mentioned how this action did either nothing for them or caused other irrelevant ads: "It's like you can block an ad 20 times block it, but there will always be something else." (Shinomura, 31) "I clicked no, and then it said this ad would not appear anymore and then it's good for 10 seconds, and then there's the next one that I don't care about that's why I stopped doing this because it doesn't do anything and it wastes my time" (Carlos, 23)

This evidence shows that even though these actions should feel helpful to participants, they do not bother with them as they believe it wastes their time as there is an endless rotation of ads that are all irrelevant to them.

The effect of control over privacy and avoiding ads, such as through ABS and VPN, was only partly supported. This is because only five participants have stated that they use such software, where one of them uses it unintentionally because someone else had installed it. Thus, although five out of twelve participants comprise around 42%,

which was the percentage of internet users using ABS found by Cooper (2021) and Dean (2021), this does not reflect an accurate representation of this sample. This is because the seven other participants stated they were unaware of such software or thought it to be useless since it does not work on SMP. Therefore, it can be suggested that privacy and control have a relatively minute impact on the ad avoidance observed in these participants.

Discussion and Conclusion

The results suggested significant indications of SMF, high ad avoidance, and negative psychological reactance. Moreover, this study analyzed to what degree the subjects' coping mechanisms were effective and found that the various techniques participants have described caused further reactance in the sense of them being annoyed, irritated, and even feeling hate towards SMA. The SMAR model provided by Huo, Liu, and Min (2021) bases itself on previous literature findings; therefore, this model should be accurate in SMAR representation. By evaluating with this SMARM in mind, this study can mostly confirm this model and advance the understanding of this phenomenon.

The impact that SMF has on SMP users is then twofold; first, it causes them to regard ads as their enemy, causing their reactance, and second, it exhausts them as they become unable to process the information available but cannot stop using it because of the addictive nature of SMP.

Most participants showed ambivalence towards personalized ads. On the one hand, they felt monitored by their phones and SMP interactions, as well as their Google searches. On the other hand, they noted that there were ads relevant to them, and some had even bought products advertised on them. Yet, participants have also stated that these relevant ads have become sporadic. Participants have found that personalized ads are scary, as they feel they invade their privacy, yet they are also sure that they, in fact, have no privacy left. When asked if they wanted ads on their feeds or not, all participants except for one have stated that if they had the option, they would turn off ads because their negative attitudes outweigh their rare positive experiences, and they want to regain control of what, when, and where to buy something.

This study is unique in the way that an important theme emerged concerning SMAR. Most of the participants have described how they tried to block, hide, or report an ad

before, but without results, which frustrated them, so they stopped doing it. This endless rotation of irrelevant or intrusive ads was not discussed in previous studies; though Youn and Kim (2019) had mentioned the possibility of this behavioral avoidance, they did not analyze them to the point of this causing further reactance, as their participants had positive responses. This study argues that these actions play a significant role in SMP users' reactance, SMF, and ad avoidance because participants approached these actions with the hopes of regaining their freedom yet found themselves in a never-ending loop of irrelevance and intrusiveness. This shows the limits that SMP users are subject to and how there is no real way for them to avoid SMA entirely. Future research should investigate the motivations and attitudes behind this behavioral avoidance, as it alleges that users can regain their freedom, yet after a short amount of time, presents them with an ad that is either more irrelevant or so personalized that it causes further privacy concerns.

These findings are of practical value and offer implications for understanding SMP users' fatigue, reactance, and ad avoidance; therefore, it could be of use for marketers and platform operators.

For marketers, it needs to be considered that SMP users feel bombarded by irrelevant ads. Therefore, reducing their reactance means reducing the volume of ads. Suggestions include promoting only relevant assets or features and engaging with the community that already engages with the brand, e.g., organic content and comments. For platform operators, it would be helpful to be more transparent about how data is used, as transparency is the best challenger for privacy concerns. It would possibly be beneficial for new users to have more straightforward terms and conditions and for existing users to be allowed to re-read and possibly re-accept these terms. This should give SMP users the feeling of regaining control. A good example was provided by Apple, with their transparent privacy updates and settings.

While this study presents important insights about the relationship between SMF and SMAR, it has its limitations. First, this study cannot be generalized and is highly specific, using a sample of young adults. This feature was revealed in the many mentions of only using Facebook for university, such as for study and course groups. Second, this study could not ask about SMF and PRT directly due to its qualitative nature to avoid any leading questions. Therefore, though all results were self-reported by the subjects, the impact of SMF and PRT could only be investigated if the subject revealed any

emotions linked to these theories. Lastly, the participants were asked about their general judgments of SMA on video platforms and on SMP feeds, but in reality, there are many different variations of ads on each SMP which would present further complications to consider when taking a quantitative approach.

Future research should investigate other specific samples, such as other age groups, to receive a good understanding of how SMAR varies at different stages of someone's life. A more extended observational period of specific subjects would also provide detail beyond primary accounts. Moreover, it would be good to conduct more qualitative studies in this field, as Huo, Liu, and Min (2020) found that the quantitative method dominates in the publications to date. Finally, the approach to the "block, hide, or report an ad" options should be further investigated to check for relevance in SMAR.

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