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Focus On Me

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Focus On Me: Effects of On-Screen Advertisements on Attention and Recall

Sarah Jane Nelson, Hannah Potts, Chakuen Rambang, and Ainsley Ambrose

In the modern world, distractions are all around us. Screens and notifications are a constant presence, competing for attention. Companies have taken advantage of people's addiction to devices by creating advertisements designed to distract from the task at hand. Whether scrolling through social media, watching television, searching the internet, or reading online articles, there are a slew of advertisements. Previous research demonstrates that advertisements have the ability to divert one's attention, and this process can be affected by many factors, like placement, relatability, and difficulty of task. Switching attention between stimuli can impact other mental processes, but the extent of this effect is not well-studied regarding on-screen advertisements. Thus, the current study aimed to evaluate the effect of on-screen advertisements on recall memory. Participants read two passages, one with pop-up advertisements and one with no advertisements. Eye tracking software was used to track eye movements, such as points and duration of fixations. To test memory, participants answered comprehension questions about each passage and the advertisements shown. We hypothesized that comprehension scores will be lower for the passage with advertisements than the passage without advertisements due to the passage with advertisements having significant time spent focusing on the advertisements rather than the passage. Results are currently being analyzed.

Keywords: memory, pop-up ads, distraction, reading comprehension, eye tracking