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THE INTERPLAY OF PARASOCIAL INTERACTION AND YOUTUBE ADVERTISING ON VOLUNTARY AD-WATCHING: A STUDY OF NIGERIAN YOUTUBE USERS

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ABSTRACT

The increasing prevalence of YouTube as a preferred platform for media consumption among Nigerians has opened new avenues for advertising, yet the dynamics of viewer engagement with ads especially voluntary ad-watching remain underexplored. Thus, this study investigated the Interplay of Parasocial Interaction and YouTube Advertising on Voluntary ad-watching. The study was hinged on Horton and Wohl 1956 Parasocial Interaction Theory. The study adopted a survey research design and data was collected using an online questionnaire. Data analysis was done using mean and standard deviation as well as Pearson Correlation coefficient. The study found a very high level of parasocial interaction among Nigerian YouTube users. The study also found moderate level of voluntary ad watching among YouTube users. The study further revealed a positive correlation between parasocial interaction and voluntary ad watching among Nigerian YouTube users. Based on its findings, the study recommended among others that YouTubers should focus on building strong, authentic connections with their audiences to leverage parasocial bonds, as these relationships significantly influence voluntary ad watching behaviour.

Keywords: Interplay, Parasocial Interaction, YouTube, Advertising, Voluntary ad-watching

Introduction

The rapid rise of YouTube and other social media platforms has transformed how people consume media, fostering direct engagement with content creators and brands. This shift has made advertising an increasingly intricate experience for viewers, particularly due to the concept of parasocial interaction—a one-sided relationship where viewers develop an emotional connection to media personalities who are unaware of their existence (Horton & Wohl, 1956). As YouTube becomes a dominant force in the digital advertising landscape, understanding the role of parasocial interaction in shaping ad-watching behaviour is essential, as viewers' connections with content creators may influence their receptiveness to advertisements embedded within content (Bond, 2016).

Parasocial interaction originally referred to the emotional bonds formed with television personalities, but it has gained renewed importance with social media, where viewers can engage with creators through likes, comments, and live chats. These interactions allow viewers to feel closer to the creators, perceiving them as friends or trustworthy individuals (Chung & Cho, 2017). For many users, YouTube personalities become reliable sources of entertainment, lifestyle advice, and even guidance on purchasing decisions. This connection may lead viewers to view advertisements positively when endorsed by their favored creators, fostering a sense of voluntary ad-watching rather than forced viewing (Frederick, Lim, Clavio, & Walsh, 2012).

YouTube's advertising model has also evolved, allowing for skippable ads, non-skippable ads, and ad sponsorships embedded directly into content. Skippable ads empower users to decide whether or not to engage, providing an ideal setting to examine the impact of parasocial bonds on voluntary ad-watching. Unlike traditional advertising, which viewers may feel compelled to endure, YouTube's format gives viewers a choice. Studies suggest that viewers may feel more inclined to watch ads if they believe it directly benefits their favorite content creator (Ham, 2020). Moreover, creators often integrate brand partnerships organically into their content, enhancing the authenticity of the advertisement and potentially influencing ad-watching as viewers see it as part of the usual interaction with the creator.

In terms of advertising effectiveness, the voluntary nature of ad-watching on YouTube represents a shift from passive consumption to active engagement, with studies showing that viewers who feel a connection with the creator may be more receptive to ads and perceive them as less intrusive (Kim & Song, 2016). This concept, however, remains underexplored in current literature, especially regarding how parasocial bonds might lead to different patterns in voluntary ad-watching behavior. With more advertisers seeking organic engagement, understanding these dynamics could provide valuable insights for brand strategies, encouraging advertisers to rethink how they leverage YouTube creators for ad placements.

Additionally, the rise of influencer marketing on YouTube has added another dimension to this interplay. Unlike

traditional media, where viewers often recognize the commercial intent behind ads, influencer partnerships can blur these lines, as creators frequently present branded content as personal recommendations. This sense of endorsement can enhance viewers' trust in the advertised products, impacting not only ad-watching but also purchase intentions (De Veirman, Cauberghe, & Hudders, 2017). Viewers who feel connected to influencers may feel more inclined to engage with ads, especially if they believe doing so supports the creator's livelihood (Lou & Yuan, 2019).

Thus, the interplay between parasocial interaction and YouTube advertising reveals complex viewer dynamics that can affect ad engagement and perceptions. By understanding how parasocial bonds influence voluntary ad-watching, researchers and advertisers can better strategize for an evolving digital landscape. This study delved into how these parasocial relationships impact viewers' willingness to watch ads on YouTube voluntarily, providing insights into how content creators and advertisers can craft more effective, viewer-friendly ad experiences.

Statement of the Problem

The increasing prevalence of YouTube as a preferred platform for media consumption among Nigerians has opened new avenues for advertising, yet the dynamics of viewer engagement with ads especially voluntary ad-watching remain underexplored. In particular, the role of parasocial interaction (PSI), where viewers form perceived relationships with YouTube personalities, has been recognized as a significant factor in influencing viewer behaviour. However, existing literature has predominantly focused on Western contexts, leaving a critical gap in understanding how these interactions affect Nigerian viewers' willingness to watch advertisements on YouTube voluntarily.

Studies indicate that PSI can make viewers more receptive to advertising messages by fostering a sense of trust and emotional connection with content creators (Kim & Song, 2016; Chung & Cho, 2017). Yet, these findings may not fully apply to Nigerian audiences, where cultural norms, levels of digital literacy, and economic considerations shape unique patterns of media engagement. Furthermore, the limited research available largely centers on traditional advertising formats, offering little insight into how skippable ads, embedded sponsorships, and influencer-endorsed content impact ad-watching behaviours among Nigerian YouTube users.

Additionally, while prior studies have highlighted the role of influencers and content creators in enhancing ad effectiveness through authenticity and personal branding (Lou & Yuan, 2019; De Veirman, Cauberghe, & Hudders, 2017), the influence of PSI on ad-watching remains inadequately addressed, especially concerning how Nigerian users perceive these endorsements. With rising data costs in Nigeria, viewers may be less inclined to watch ads unless they feel a strong connection to the creator, who may encourage ad-watching as a way of supporting their content. This context underscores the importance of understanding whether and how PSI can drive voluntary ad-watching, filling a crucial gap in the literature around user-driven ad engagement in African contexts.

This study is essential in addressing these gaps, as it seeks to explore the specific factors that influence Nigerian YouTube users' ad-watching behaviours, focusing on the impact of parasocial interactions. By investigating how these relationships shape voluntary engagement with ads, this study offered valuable insights for marketers, content creators, and advertisers targeting Nigerian audiences. Furthermore, the findings could help Nigerian content creators craft more effective strategies for brand partnerships, leading to more authentic, trust-based ad experiences that resonate with viewers. Ultimately, this study aims to contribute to the broader discourse on digital advertising in Africa, highlighting the unique interplay of parasocial dynamics and voluntary ad engagement in Nigeria's rapidly growing digital economy.

Research Objectives

1. To ascertain the level of parasocial interaction among Nigerian YouTube users.
2. To ascertain the level of voluntary ad watching among YouTube users in Nigeria.
3. To examine the correlation between between parasocial interaction and voluntary ad watching among Nigerian YouTube users.
4. To examine how parasocial interaction influence voluntary ad watching on YouTube users in Nigeria.

Literature Review

Parasocial Interaction

Parasocial interaction (PSI) is a psychological concept that describes a kind of "one-sided" relationship where an individual feels emotionally connected to a media personality, celebrity, or fictional character without any direct reciprocation (Stever, 2017). Originally introduced by Horton and Wohl in 1956, the concept suggests that people can develop deep, meaningful relationships with media figures in the same way they would with actual friends or acquaintances, despite the lack of real interaction. PSI has evolved as an important area of research in media studies, psychology, and sociology, particularly as digital media has expanded the ways people connect with and consume content.

The concept of PSI emerged in response to the growing influence of television in the mid-20th century, where figures like newscasters and show hosts became almost "familiar" faces in viewers' lives. Horton and Wohl argued that repeated exposure to these personalities in intimate settings (such as a living room via television) could lead to viewers feeling they knew the characters or hosts personally, despite only ever experiencing them through a screen (Brown, 2015). This illusion of intimacy forms the basis of PSI, which is distinct from real-life interactions as it is nonreciprocal, the media figure does not know or respond to the viewer on an individual level.

Several mechanisms underpin PSI, enabling the viewer to perceive a bond with a distant, mediated personality. One primary mechanism is illusion of intimacy, where viewers feel personally connected to the figure due to consistent exposure to their voice, expressions, and demeanor over time. This connection grows stronger as viewers perceive familiarity and begin to anticipate the figure's mannerisms and responses, deepening the sense of a personal

relationship (Kim & Song, 2016). Another mechanism, emotional involvement, is essential to PSI. Viewers may experience real emotions such as empathy, affection, or even sadness towards a character or media figure, particularly when the figure represents relatable experiences or emotions. This emotional investment reinforces the illusion of a meaningful relationship, allowing the individual to become emotionally attached to the figure despite the lack of actual interaction. Identification with the media personality is also significant. When viewers see aspects of themselves in a character, such as shared values or similar life experiences, they are more likely to form a strong PSI. Social media has intensified this dynamic by providing a more interactive and personalized engagement with celebrities and influencers who share intimate details of their lives, further blurring the line between parasocial and reciprocal relationships.

Social Media Advertisement

Social media advertisement has become a fundamental component of modern marketing, leveraging the expansive reach and data-driven capabilities of platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube and TikTok to connect businesses with potential customers. As an integral part of digital marketing strategies, social media advertisement enables brands to reach targeted audiences, engage users with tailored content, and drive conversions at various stages of the customer journey (Khanom, 2023). This form of advertising is particularly advantageous in today's digital era, where billions of people are active on social media and receptive to interactive, visually engaging content. Social media advertisement refers to paid marketing efforts on social platforms aimed at promoting products, services, or brand messages. Unlike traditional advertising that broadcasts a message to the masses, social media ads can be tailored based on user demographics, interests, behaviors, and online activities, allowing businesses to deliver highly relevant content to specific audiences (Kenton, 2019). This precision makes social media advertising a cost-effective strategy for both small and large businesses, enabling them to optimize their marketing budgets by only reaching audiences likely to convert.

Social media advertisement is a powerful and versatile tool that enables brands to connect with audiences in targeted and engaging ways as its importance is underscored by the sheer scale and influence of social media. According to Statista, over 4.9 billion people globally were using social media as of 2023, with average daily usage around two and a half hours (Dixon, 2024). This vast audience offers brands unparalleled opportunities to build awareness, generate leads, foster brand loyalty, and gather consumer insights in real-time. Additionally, social media platforms constantly enhance their ad formats, targeting options, and analytics, making it easier for advertisers to monitor and optimize their campaigns (IBM, 2022). Social media advertisement includes image advertisement, video advertisement, carousel advertisement, stories advertisement, messenger advertisement, content/influencer's advertisement and shopping advertisement. These advertisements have their various importance and usage.

Targeting in Social Media Advertising

One of the defining features of social media advertising is its sophisticated targeting capabilities. Social media platforms collect vast amounts of data on user behaviors, preferences, locations, and demographics, which advertisers can leverage to pinpoint specific audience segments. Key targeting options include:

Demographic Targeting: Allows advertisers to select audiences based on age, gender, income level, education, and other basic demographic factors.

Interest-Based Targeting: Advertisers can reach users with specific interests, such as fashion, sports, technology, or fitness, enabling more relevant content to reach interested users.

Behavioral Targeting: This method targets users based on their online behavior, including past purchases, app usage, and content interaction.

Location-Based Targeting: Allows brands to reach people in specific geographical areas, which is especially useful for local businesses or events.

Lookalike Audiences: Lookalike targeting helps brands reach new users who share similarities with their existing customers, increasing the chances of conversion.

These targeting options allow advertisers to precisely reach people most likely to engage with or purchase from the brand, enhancing the efficiency and impact of advertising budgets.

YouTube: Celebrity and advertisement

Celebrities wield significant influence on YouTube, acting as powerful channels for brand messaging. This influence of celebrities can be attributed to the perceived credibility that audiences associate with public figures. Research suggests that consumers are more likely to trust recommendations from individuals they admire and follow, as these endorsements carry more personal and emotional weight than conventional advertising (Cheah et al., 2024; Han & Balabanis, 2023; Al-Mu'ani, et al., 2023). On YouTube, celebrities themselves are often content creators, which shifts the nature of advertising. Instead of only starring in brand ads, many celebrities host their own YouTube channels where they produce content independently.

YouTube also enables micro-celebrities or influencers to rise alongside traditional celebrities. These influencers, who often have niche or dedicated followers, collaborate with brands to create advertisement content that resonates with specific demographic groups. Unlike mainstream celebrities, influencers typically engage with their fans in highly interactive ways, answering questions, giving personalized advice, or even livestreaming (Brooks et al., 2023). This level of engagement fosters a strong sense of community, which significantly impacts purchasing decisions and brand image.

YouTube's algorithm also plays a vital role in amplifying the reach of celebrity-driven advertisements. When viewers engage with celebrity content, it signals to YouTube's recommendation system that similar videos should be promoted, often increasing views and interaction (Cooper & McLachlan, 2021). This effect can drive a video to "trending" status, which generates additional visibility and organic engagement with the advertisement. The integration of celebrities into YouTube advertisements also affects consumer perception. According to Kıvrak and Kıvrak (2024), many YouTube users

appreciate content that feels like a personal endorsement rather than traditional advertising, associating such content with authenticity. As a result, celebrity endorsements can lead to higher brand recall and increased trust in the product.

There are, however, limitations to the effectiveness of celebrity endorsements on YouTube as overuse of sponsored content or overtly commercialized videos may lead to viewer fatigue. Audiences are highly discerning and can distinguish between genuine recommendations and forced endorsements (Majeed et al., 2020). By implication, when celebrities excessively promote products, audiences may perceive them as driven by monetary incentives, which can harm both the celebrity's and the brand's reputations. Therefore, a careful balance is needed to ensure that celebrity endorsements remain impactful without compromising authenticity.

Voluntary ad watching

Voluntary ad watching is a form of digital advertising where users choose to watch advertisements willingly. This can happen in exchange for benefits like rewards, discounts, or access to free content, such as in some mobile apps or video platforms. In simple terms, voluntary ad watching is when people choose to watch advertisements on their own, without being forced or required to do so.

Voluntary ad watching differs from traditional advertisement watching where ads are automatically displayed or embedded, as it emphasizes user consent and engagement. The concept of voluntary ad watching is particularly prevalent in digital environments like mobile apps, gaming platforms, and streaming services, where users can opt-in to view ads in exchange for specific benefits.

Conceptually, voluntary ad watching aligns with principles of user-centered advertising by giving audiences control over their ad experience, which can increase both viewer satisfaction and ad effectiveness (Ahmed et al., 2019). According to research, ads that are willingly watched often lead to higher engagement and a more positive brand perception, as users are more attentive and receptive when they feel in control (Efendioğlu & Durmaz, 2022; Murillo-Zegarra, et al., 2020).

Effect of parasocial interaction on individual and social interaction

The rise of social media has greatly transformed PSI by making interactions feel more immediate and reciprocal. Platforms like Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube allow for simulated direct engagement through likes, comments, and personal updates. The interactive features of social media enable viewers to feel as though they are part of a celebrity's life or even that their opinion matters, enhancing the sense of connection (Patel et al., 2023).

Social media influencers and creators, in particular, cultivate parasocial relationships by inviting their audience into their lives, often addressing their followers directly and fostering a community around shared values or interests (Reynolds, 2022). For instance, influencers may address their followers as "friends" or "family," deepening the illusion of a reciprocal relationship. Studies suggest that this form of PSI is especially prominent among younger audiences, who may see these media figures as role models and

sources of advice, further embedding the PSI in their everyday lives (Yuksel & Labrecque, 2016; Stein et al., 2022). PSI has profound implications for media, culture, and society at large. In marketing, PSI is harnessed by brands through celebrity endorsements and influencer partnerships. When consumers feel an attachment to a media figure, they are more likely to trust and follow recommendations from that figure, creating a lucrative opportunity for targeted marketing strategies (Ye et al., 2021).

In a societal context, PSI can influence public opinion and behavior, as media figures often serve as key role models or opinion leaders (Stehr et al., 2015). For example, public health campaigns frequently rely on parasocial figures to promote healthy behavior, with celebrities endorsing vaccination or environmental sustainability. PSI can also shape political opinions, as charismatic politicians or activists with strong media presence can elicit emotional support from viewers, leading to higher engagement and advocacy among the public.

Empirical Studies and Gap in Literature

Despite the extensive body of research on parasocial interactions (PSI) and their influence on various consumer behaviors, several gaps remain in understanding the specific dynamics involving YouTube advertising and voluntary ad-watching. While Chung and Cho (2017) provide valuable insights into how social media interactions bolster celebrity endorsements through parasocial relationships, their work primarily centers on general social media platforms and celebrity endorsements rather than focusing on user-generated content and advertising engagement. This leaves a gap in understanding how PSI with content creators, who are not traditional celebrities but influencers on platforms like YouTube, influences specific consumer actions such as voluntary ad-watching.

Sung, et al., (2023) contribute significantly by examining voluntary ad-watching on YouTube and how PSI drives this behavior. However, their study emphasizes users' motivations to support YouTubers and the role of ad comprehension, providing a limited exploration of the broader advertising dynamics beyond user support. They did not delve into how specific advertising characteristics might interact with PSI to affect voluntary ad-watching behaviours.

De Bérail and Bungener (2022) broaden the understanding of PSR on YouTube by linking it to social anxiety and platform addiction, identifying nuanced PSR dimensions. However, their research did not address how these dimensions interact with advertising, particularly how different PSR characteristics might affect viewers' responses to ads or influence their willingness to engage with ads voluntarily. This indicates a gap in literature exploring how PSR dimensions influence ad engagement, beyond addictive or habitual platform use.

Iqbal et al. (2022) shed light on the role of PSR in repeated viewing and brand loyalty, focusing on TV and YouTube channel addiction. Notably, they found that PSRs do not mediate the link between YouTube addiction and repeated viewing, highlighting a disparity in how PSR functions across different media formats. This suggests that the relationship between PSR and voluntary

engagement with YouTube ads remains underexplored, particularly how users' emotional and behavioral connections with YouTubers translate into ad-watching behavior distinct from viewing habits.

Perez (2021) provides an important perspective by analyzing how PSI with digital influencers impacts consumer attitudes toward advertising on social media platforms. Perez's findings show that strong PSI can enhance positive attitudes toward ads when viewers perceive the influencer as authentic and relatable. However, the study does not specifically address how this translates to voluntary ad-watching behaviors or the unique context of YouTube, where ad formats and viewer motivations may differ significantly from other social media platforms. This omission highlights the need for targeted research into how PSI with YouTube content creators affects ad-watching choices, especially in non-Western contexts.

In summary, while existing studies have advanced knowledge on parasocial interactions, social media endorsements, and user engagement with YouTube content, there remains a significant gap in comprehensively understanding the interplay between PSI and YouTube advertising, specifically in the context of voluntary ad-watching. No current research holistically addresses how PSI with YouTube content creators influences users' ad-watching behavior in ways that go beyond mere support for the creator, such as examining the effects of ad format, ad placement, and viewer motivations. This study aims to fill this gap by exploring these aspects within the context of Nigerian YouTube users, providing a culturally specific perspective that is often overlooked in the broader literature.

Theoretical Framework

Parasocial Interaction Theory

Parasocial Interaction Theory was developed by Horton and Wohl in 1956. This theory focuses on the idea that audiences can form one-sided, emotionally intense relationships with media personalities, despite the lack of actual interpersonal interaction. A primary assumption of the theory is that these relationships, termed parasocial, feel real to the audience members, often resembling genuine friendships or connections (Perse & Rubin, 1989). Although these interactions lack reciprocity and can lead to strong feelings of loyalty and attachment toward the media figure. This sense of closeness, in turn, influences viewers' behavior and decision-making as though they were supporting a personal friend.

In relation to the present study, Parasocial Interaction Theory provides a compelling explanation for why viewers might voluntarily watch ads. YouTube creators often establish strong connections with their audience through consistent content, personal disclosures, and direct engagement, cultivating a parasocial relationship. Viewers who feel a personal connection to a YouTuber may be more willing to watch ads voluntarily as a way of showing support. The emotional attachment built through parasocial interaction can encourage viewers to take actions that benefit the creator, such as ad-watching, because they feel a sense of loyalty and desire to help the creator succeed.

This theory effectively explains how the interplay between parasocial interaction and

advertising on YouTube can lead to voluntary ad-watching, as viewers are motivated by a genuine (albeit one-sided) connection with the creator. Thus, the parasocial bond transforms what could be an ordinary ad experience into an opportunity for viewers to support someone they care about, making them more likely to engage with ads out of loyalty rather than mere obligation.

Methodology

This study adopted a survey research design. Thus, an online 5-point scale questionnaire was used as the instrument of data collection. The study participant consists of 570 YouTube users selected from major Nigerian influencers pages through YouTube ad placements. The data collected from the study was using SPSS version 25 and analysed using descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) and parametric statistics (Pearson Correlation Coefficient). As such, simple percentages, mean and standard as well as person correlation was used to analyse the research questions.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Research Objective 1: To ascertain the level of parasocial interaction among Nigerian YouTube users.

Table 1: Mean rating and standard deviation on the level of parasocial interaction among Nigerian YouTube users

Item	X	SD	Remark
I feel a sense of friendship or closeness with YouTubers I frequently watch.	4.42	.78	Very High Level
I find myself emotionally invested in the personal stories or experiences shared by my favorite YouTubers.	4.26	.85	Very High Level
I often feel like I know the YouTuber personally, even though we have never interacted directly.	2.57	1.12	Low Level
I regularly follow the opinions or recommendations given by my favorite YouTubers as if they were a trusted friend.	3.39	0.95	Moderate Level
I feel disappointed or affected when a YouTuber I follow stops posting or makes significant changes to their content.	3.56	0.88	High Level
Grand Mean	**3.64**		**Very High Level**

Data presented in table 1 shows that there is a very high level of parasocial interaction among Nigerian YouTube users with a grand mean of 2.64.

Research Question 2: To ascertain the level of voluntary ad watching among YouTube users in Nigeria.

Table 2: Mean rating and standard deviation on the level of voluntary ad watching among YouTube users

Item	x	SD	Remark
I voluntarily watch ads on YouTube to support my favorite creators.	3.85	.92	High Level
I am interested in the ads shown during my favorite YouTuber's videos.	2.45	1.10	Low Level
I allow ads to play without skipping if I believe they are informative.	3.72	.88	High Level
I do not mind watching ads as long as they do not interrupt the content too much.	3.30	1.05	Moderate Level
I actively click on ads that catch my interest while watching YouTube.	3.67	.97	High Level
Grand Mean	**3.39**		**Moderate Level**

Data in table 2 shows that there is a moderate level of voluntary ad watching among YouTube users with a mean score of 3.39.

Research Question 3: To examine the correlation between parasocial interaction and voluntary ad watching among Nigerian YouTube users.

Table 3: Pearson Correlation between parasocial interaction and voluntary ad watching among Nigerian YouTube users

		Parasocial interaction	Voluntary ad watching
Parasocial interaction	Pearson Correlation	1	.960**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	100	100
Voluntary ad watching	Pearson Correlation	.960**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	570	570

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Data presented in table 3 shows a significant positive correlation between parasocial interaction and voluntary ad watching among Nigerian YouTube users with a significant value of .000.

Research Question 4: To examine how parasocial interaction influence voluntary ad watching on YouTube users in Nigeria.

Table 4: Mean and Standard Deviation on how parasocial interaction influence voluntary ad watching on YouTube users in Nigeria

Item	x	SD	Remark
My connection with YouTubers makes me more likely to watch ads on their videos.	3.80	0.91	Agree
I feel obligated to watch ads to support the YouTubers I follow.	4.10	0.85	Strongly agree
When I feel emotionally connected to a YouTuber, I engage more with ads.	3.65	0.97	Agree
I watch ads to help YouTubers earn revenue from their content.	3.90	0.84	Strongly Agree
I am more likely to watch ads if I feel that I have a personal connection with the YouTuber.	3.50	1.05	Agree
Grand Mean	**3.79**		**Strongly Agree**

The data presented in table 4 shows a strong agreement that parasocial interaction influence voluntary ad watching on YouTube users in Nigeria with a mean score of 3.79.

Discussion of Findings

The study based on its first objectives found an overall high level of parasocial interaction among Nigerian YouTube users. The mean scores and standard deviations indicate varying degrees of connection that users feel toward the YouTubers they frequently watch, illustrating both strong and moderate levels of emotional and psychological engagement. The study also found significant level of parasocial interaction, suggesting that Nigerian YouTube users generally maintain a

considerable connection with content creators. It was further found that Nigerian YouTube users often develop a deep emotional connection and sense of closeness with YouTubers. This indicate that many users not only watch content for entertainment or information but also form perceived friendships or bonds with the YouTubers they follow. This points to the immersive nature of YouTube content, where personal stories, shared experiences, and relatable personalities foster strong viewer-creator relationships. Such connections may lead to a sense of familiarity and trust, blurring the boundaries between online entertainment and personal social interaction. However, the study found a notable variation in how users perceive these interactions on different levels. It was found that while some viewers might strongly feel this emotional closeness, they may not necessarily believe they know the YouTuber on a personal level, reflecting a nuanced engagement pattern among YouTube users. Moreover, the study found that YouTube users are somewhat divided on whether they view YouTubers as trusted friends whose recommendations they regularly follow. This suggests that while emotional attachment is strong, it may not always translate into complete trust or influence over personal decisions. By implication, while some users highly regard YouTubers opinions, others may view them more critically or distantly. Furthermore, the study found that YouTube users are emotionally affected when their favorite YouTubers stop posting or significantly change their content; this emphasizes the strong connections many users feel as well as underscores how deeply invested users can become, viewing these content creators as part of their routines and social landscapes.

Through the second research objective, the study reveals a mixed but generally moderate level of voluntary ad watching among YouTube users. The findings show that while many users willingly engage with ads, their level of interaction varies depending on the nature of the ad and its relevance to their interests. The study also found that users watch ads to support their favorite YouTubers or when they perceive the ads as informative. This suggests that viewers are more likely to interact with ads when they feel that doing so aligns with supporting the content creators they follow, or when they believe the ads provide useful information. The willingness to allow ads to play without skipping, especially if perceived as informative, further emphasizes that utility and support for creators are important motivators. The study also found when it comes to actively clicking on ads, there is low engagement level. This indicates that while users are generally open to watching ads, they are less likely to take action beyond passive viewing unless the ads are particularly engaging or relevant. On the other hand, the study found that users show a moderate level of tolerance toward ads, provided they do not disrupt their viewing experience too much, suggesting a preference for ads that are less intrusive. Interestingly, the study found that interest in the ads themselves is low, particularly when compared to the high level of engagement with content from the YouTubers. This implies that while users may be willing to watch ads, they are not inherently interested in the ads as standalone content, but rather as part of the overall viewing experience.

The study through its third objectives found a significant positive correlation between parasocial interaction and voluntary ad watching among Nigerian YouTube users. This finding supports the finding of Perez (2021) who found that strong PSI can enhance positive attitudes toward ads when viewers perceive the influencer as credible.

Through its fourth objective, the study found a significant impact of parasocial interaction on voluntary ad-watching behavior among YouTube users in Nigeria. Overall, the results indicate a strong correlation between the level of emotional connection users feel with YouTubers and their willingness to engage with ads on the platform. This finding supports the finding of Sung, et al., (2023) who found that PSI drives ad watching behaviour among YouTube users. The current study further found that YouTube users feel obliged to watch ads as a form of support for their favorite YouTubers. This suggests that when viewers form strong, supportive bonds with content creators, they see ad-watching as a way to contribute to the creator's success, demonstrating a high degree of loyalty and appreciation.

The study also found that users watch ads to help YouTubers earn revenue. This highlights the viewers' awareness of the monetization process and their willingness to actively contribute by watching ads, signifying that many users are motivated by a sense of responsibility toward creators they admire. Additionally, the study found that users' general connection to YouTubers makes them more likely to watch ads. This finding implies that emotional investment plays a key role as users who feel closely connected to the content creators report being more inclined to support them through ad engagement. This finding reinforces the idea that strong parasocial relationships enhance the likelihood of users participating in ad-watching, as viewers perceive these creators as friends or trusted figures. The study again found that level of emotional connection further influences ad engagement. This underscores that viewers who feel personally connected to YouTubers are more likely to engage with ads, even if they are not obligated to.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study highlights the significant levels of parasocial interaction among Nigerian YouTube users, demonstrating that many users form deep emotional connections and perceived relationships with content creators; suggesting that YouTube serves as more than an entertainment platform but also a space where personal connections and emotional engagement thrive, shaping user behavior and perception. However, the variation in user experiences indicates that while many viewers feel emotionally close to YouTubers, they may not always extend this connection to trust or view them as personal friends. This nuanced pattern reflects the complex nature of parasocial relationships among Nigerian YouTube users.

The study also concludes that a moderate willingness exists among Nigerian YouTube users to watch ads voluntarily, driven by the desire to support content creators and the perceived informational value of the ads. Nonetheless, active ad engagement, such as clicking, remains low among YouTube users. These insights contribute to understanding user motivations and interactions on digital

platforms, offering valuable implications for content creators and advertisers seeking to engage with audiences more effectively.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the study recommends that:

1. Content creators should continue to develop personal and relatable content that fosters deep emotional connections, as this high level of parasocial interaction drives user engagement and loyalty.
2. YouTubers and marketers should design ads that align with viewers' interests and incorporate support messages to motivate users to watch ads voluntarily, recognizing the moderate existing willingness.
3. Creators should integrate subtle promotional content that capitalizes on the positive correlation between parasocial interaction and ad watching, ensuring that ad placements feel natural and maintain viewer trust.
4. YouTubers should focus on building strong, authentic connections with their audiences to leverage parasocial bonds, as these relationships significantly influence voluntary ad watching behavior.

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