DEVICE STUDY 2016

Ad blocking in UK & US
The use of ad blocking software is very much a desktop phenomenon with around a quarter using it on the desktop compared to just 2% using it on the mobile. Interestingly enough there is a large gap between the number of people saying that they use ad blocking and the number of people that we have detected using ad blocking. This can in part be explained by the usage of several devices throughout the day.

Let's face it. Internet users are not really fond of ads as of 2016. Especially not ads in video clips. In our study we see that far more people in both Great Britain and the United States are negative than positive towards video ads. Only 15% in UK and 13% in US are positive, while 53% in UK and 54% in US have a negative attitude towards ads in video clips. With this knowledge it's no wonder that ad blocking has become such a widespread nuisance for the ad industry.

In this study we have used two methods to gauge the ad blocking usage: survey and technical detection. And even though both methods prove high adoption of ad blockers, there is a discrepancy between the two.

Massive use of ad blocking

In UK 47% of the population inform that they are blocking ads on either their desktop, tablet or mobile, while this is the case with as many as 52% of the US population. However, we see a large gap between the number of people saying that they use ad blocking and the number of people that we have detected using ad blocking. In UK 46% claim that they are blocking ads on their desktop, while 16% claim that they are blocking ads on their mobile, but the number of people that we have detected using ad blocking is 26% on desktop and 2% on mobile. And the picture is more or less the same in US. This can at least to some degree be explained by the use of several devices throughout the day. For instance, at work and at home.

Ad blockers want to avoid irrelevant ads

When looking at why people in UK and US use ad blocking, we see that two main reasons stand out. First, the UK and US ad blockers are blocking ads because they think that websites are more manageable without banners. Secondly, they are blocking ads to avoid offensive and irrelevant ads. They are simply tired of being exposed to ads without any personal relevance. This is also supported by the fact that the ad blockers attitude towards ads would be affected positively by personalized ads.

Serve personalized ads

In UK 31% say that their attitude towards ads would be affected in a positive way if ads were displaying relevant messages, while just 23% would be affected in a negative way. And in US they would be even more positively affected by personalized ads. While just 19% would be affected in a negative way, 43% would be affected positively if ads were displaying relevant messages. This shows how the use of ad blocking can be curbed by serving personalized ads with relevant messages, which calls for a data driven approach to advertising.

Get further insights

On the following pages you will get additional insights into the use of ad blocking and the attitude towards ads among the UK and US population. Enjoy!
Ad blocking in UK

Use of ad blocking across devices in UK

When asking people in UK about their use of ad blocking across devices, almost half of population say that they block ads on their desktop while respectively 16% and 17% say that they block ads on their mobile and tablet.

However, the detected ad block usage is lower. On desktop the actual use of ad blocking is 26% while the actual use of ad blocking on mobile is just 2%. This is 20 pp below on desktop and 14 pp below on mobile compared to when people are asked about their use of ad blocking.

The discrepancies can be explained by people having access to several devices throughout the day as well as whitelisting and survey recall bias.

Use of ad blocking across demographics in UK

When looking at the use of ad blocking across demographics, we see that blocking ads is most widespread among the young part of the UK population. In the age group of 15-25, 58% say that they use ad blocking on either their desktop, tablet or mobile. This is the case with around half of the 26-35 years old, while 41% of the UK population in the age group of 36-55 are blocking ads. Finally, 46% in the age group of 56 or above say that they use ad blocking.

Across genders we see differences in the use of ad blocking as well. Among the women, 40% say that they are blocking ads on one of their devices, compared to 54% of the men.
Ad blocking is primarily used on desktop in US. Half of the US population say that they use ad blocking on their desktop while 22% say that they block ads on their tablet and mobile. However, as it is the case in UK, there is a large gap between the number of people saying that they use ad blocking and the number of people who we have detected using ad blocking.

In our study we have detected 23% using ad blocking on their desktop and just 2% blocking ads on their mobile. This is 27 pp below on desktop and 20 pp below on mobile compared to the number of people who say that they use ad blocking on these devices.

The use of ad blocking in US is most widespread among the young part of the population. Among the 15-25 years old, 59% say that they use ad blocking on either their desktop, tablet or mobile, while this is the case with as many as 67% among the 26-35 years old. However, with more than half of the 36-55 years old saying that they use ad blocking this age group is not far behind. Only the 56+ years old is a bit behind even though around four out of ten in this age group professedly are blocking ads.

Across genders we see the same picture as in UK, where blocking ads is more widespread among men than women. Among the men 58% say that they use ad blocking, while this is the case with 47% of the women.
Reasons for ad blocking

Why UK population use ad blocking

When looking at the reasons for blocking ads in UK, we see that especially two reasons stand out. Among the UK population, 31% say that they are blocking ads because websites are more manageable without banners. Also, 31% say that they want to avoid offensive or irrelevant messages in ads and thus are blocking ads.

However, other reasons also underline the use of ad blocking. Longer loading time of websites and online behaviour tracking are pointed out as reasons for blocking ads among 23% of the UK population.

Finally, 10% say that they are blocking ads to limit their data usage.

Why US population use ad blocking

As it is the case in UK, the US population primarily block ads because they think websites are more manageable without banners and because they want to avoid offensive or irrelevant ads. This is the case with respectively 34% and 30% of the US population.

Besides this more than a quarter point out longer loading time of websites and online behaviour tracking as reasons for blocking ads.

As a final reason, 15% say that they want to limit their data usage by blocking ads.
Attitude towards advertising in UK

When looking at the attitude towards ads in UK we find a good explanation of the widespread use of ad blocking among the UK population.

Generally, people are negative towards ads regardless of whether they are placed on commercial websites or in online video clips. However, especially ads in online video clips have a negative impact.

Among the UK population, around one third are affected in a negative way by ads on commercial websites, while more than half are affected negatively by ads in online video clips.

Attitude towards advertising in US

The attitude towards ads in US is very similar to the picture in UK showing that the widespread use of ad blocking among the US population are rooted in a generally negative attitude towards ads.

Among the US population, 35% are affected negatively by ads on commercial websites, while 54% are affected in a negative way by ads in online video clips.
Attitude towards personalized advertising in UK

When the UK population is asked about how it would affect their attitude towards ads if the displayed messages were relevant to them, we see that it would generally have a positive effect.

Among the UK population, 42% claim that it would not affect their attitude towards ads in any way if the ads were personalized, but a greater share would be affected positively than negatively by ads with relevant messages.

This indicates that a greater focus on serving personalized ads might be a way to curb the increasing use of ad blocking.

Attitude towards personalized advertising in US

When looking at the attitude towards personalized ads among the US population compared to the UK population, we see that they would be even more positively affected if the displayed ads contained relevant messages.

While 34% would not be affected in any way by personalized ads, as many as 43% would have an improved experience if the ads displayed relevant messages. For comparison, only 19% would be affected in a negative way by personalized ads.

This shows that especially in US, serving relevant ads is a way to curb the increasing use of ad blocking.
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About AudienceProject
AudienceProject has its roots in market research, technology and large scale data. It helps brands, agencies, publishers and e-commerce companies identify, target and validate audiences. The products range from audience planning, validation and targeting on socio-demographics as well as other variables.

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About the study
The ad blocking study is a part of a larger device study by AudienceProject with data collected through online surveys done in Q3 2016. The respondents have been selected from our UK and US panel of 350.000 panelists and weighted to achieve representativity on the more than 2.200 respondents who completed the survey.

Our ad blocking study has the aim of examining the attitude towards ads and the use of ad blocking among the UK and US population.

We have detected the respondents actual use of ad blocking by having placed an ad with a tracking pixel in our survey enabling us to measure the number of times the ad has been blocked by an ad blocker.