**Navigating the Interplay of Ad Avoidance, Government Messaging, and UN SDG 11: A Theoretical Review**

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**Keywords**: Ad avoidance, Government messaging, SDG 11, Sustainable cities, Sustainable communities

**Introduction**

Consumers increasingly turn to ad avoidance to actively avoid or block advertising (Dinana, 2022). Whilst researchers started examining ad avoidance half a century ago in the context of television and print ads (Li et al., 2002; Wells et al., 1971); with emerging online technologies and closed platforms like Facebook, Instagram (Youn & Kim, 2019; Yulita et al., 2022), the consumer has a number of ways to block ads from their computers, smartphones, or internet connected devices.

Online ad blocking initially impacted advertisers on desktops but can impact government communications which has been promoting content online. Public service announcements (PSA)traditionally aired on television and print but were increasingly promoted on social media during the covid pandemic (Hyland-Wood et al., 2021). This has resulted in government communication offices not prepared to deal with ad blocking of their promoted content online.

For government agencies whose goal is to promote programs related to the UN SDG 11, it is imperative to understand how to overcome ad blocking. For example, in terms of promoting sustainable cities and communities (UN SDG 11), some government messaging highlights environmentally friendly products (Alamsyah et al., 2020) as well as waste planning management (Šomplák et al., 2019). If their intended target audiences practice ad avoidance routinely (like prolific blockers of ads or shifting media during ads), then the messaging will not reach them through this route and will in turn reduce the achievement of the government agency’s goal.

Current literature does not focus on the relationship between ad avoidance and government messaging as the later has normally been distributed in the form of PSA in traditional media or media coverage. Since UN SDGs came into force January 2016 (UN, 2016), research on impact of ad avoidance on government messaging related to SDG 11 is nascent. Our purpose is to explore the interrelationship of ad avoidance and government messaging in the context UN SDG 11. Theoretical understanding of this interrelationship is important for framing public policy in the context of changing behaviour and increasing importance of SDGs.

**Relevant Background**

Ad avoidance research focuses on role of emotions (Poels & Dewitte, 2019) and different theories like psychological reactance theory (Youn & Kim, 2019). Studies show that consumers use cognitive (ignoring the media), behavioural (leaving the media), and mechanical (blocking the media) types of Ad avoidance (Dinana, 2022). Greater perceived personalisation can decrease ad avoidance whereas privacy concerns and ad irritation increase ad avoidance (Baek & Morimoto, 2012).

Grunig and Hunt’s (1984) seminal work on public information explored the one-way messaging style of government communications which tend to be on traditional media. However, whilst government agencies often have a social media presence, to show up in the algorithm, they are having to turn towards promoted content. Yet, little if any consideration has been taken in relation to ad blocking.

**Research Approach**

We examine the literature on ad avoidance and government messaging during last ten years and use it to create a framework to explain the impact of ad avoidance on government messaging related to sustainable cities and communities (UN SDG 11).

**New theoretical framework**

Our theoretical review outlines how ad avoidance reduces the impact of government messaging related to SDG 11. This will further our understanding of the important role of ad avoidance that has not been explored in the existing literature on government messaging.

**Discussion**

The theoretical framework helps explain how ad avoidance may impact government messaging in achieving SDG 11 in different ways. First, ad avoidance may reduce the effectiveness of government campaigns that uses advertising as a primary means of communication. As individuals who engage in ad avoidance are likely to miss these messages, the reach and impact of government campaigns may be diminished.

Second, ad avoidance may affect the public's perception and understanding of government messaging. Individuals who engage in ad avoidance may be less likely to be exposed to information and messages about sustainable cities and communities and the role of government in promoting these. Third, ad avoidance may impact funding for the government sustainable cities and communities’ initiatives. As advertising revenues are a significant source of funding for many government campaigns, ad avoidance may reduce the resources available for sustainable cities and communities’ initiatives.

Overall, ad avoidance makes it more challenging for governments to effectively communicate the importance of SDG 11 and mobilize public support. Therefore, it's important for government to explore alternative ways to reach and engage citizens, such as through social media, grassroots campaigns, and community outreach, to promote messaging (related to sustainable cities and communities) and achieve SDG 11.

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