

# Brand safety and the unblocked web

How adblock users respond to tamper-proof advertising

# Foreword

This report presents the findings of an important research collaboration between the UK advertisers body ISBA, the Advertising Research Foundation, and PageFair. Our research reveals how adblock users actually react when shown ads that adblock tools are unable to tamper with. We also reveal how this “unblocked” audience of adblock users responds to brands shown in those ads.

Over 2,300 study participants were shown LEAN display format ads on several premium websites. These LEAN display ads adhere to the Coalition For Better Ads initial standard, and address adblock users’ legitimate UX, bandwidth, and security grievances.

We found that the unblocked audience is brand safe. Indeed, adblock users react more favorably to advertised brands than regular users in some cases.

Our findings are good news for marketers and for publishers. Global adblock usage has climbed past 615 million devices worldwide. Many publishers, including Facebook, have begun to serve advertising that adblock companies cannot block. This is essential for the sustainability of the Web as a whole, and is good news for marketers.

As this study shows, the “unblocking” of this audience creates space for brand safe marketing to a 100% human audience.



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# Satisfaction levels and brand response

Regular users and adblock users react similarly to mainstream websites showing display ads.

## Key findings

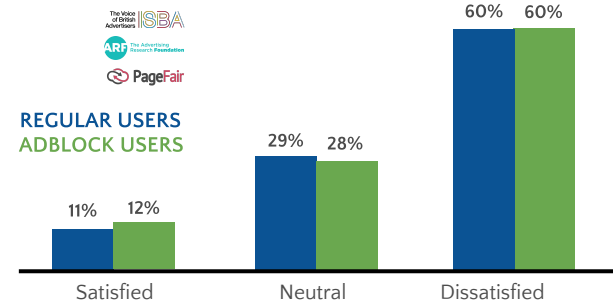
- Adblock users and regular users have virtually identical levels of satisfaction when viewing a mainstream web page that includes standard display ads.
- Adblock users and regular users have almost identical attitudes to the advertised brand.

## Analysis

It is likely that many people install adblock to protect them from poor experiences on the worst sites on the web, and from particularly bad advertising formats. But when shown a simple LEAN standard display ad on a mainstream website they are as happy with their experience on the website as regular users, and their attitude toward the brand shown in the ad is no different from regular users.

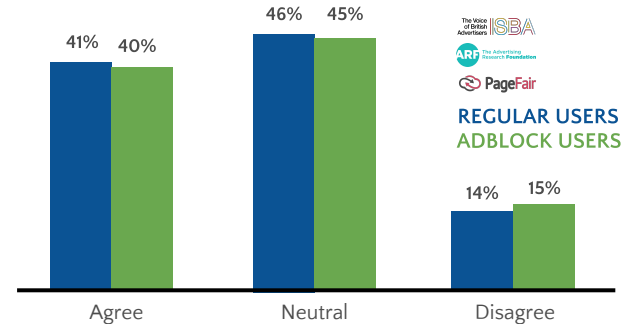
## Attitude toward websites that show advertising

“Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with this webpage?”



## Attitude toward brand shown in ad on website

“I have a positive attitude toward [brand]”



# When users are bothered by ads

Adblock users' attitudes toward advertising do not cause negative attitudes toward a brand.

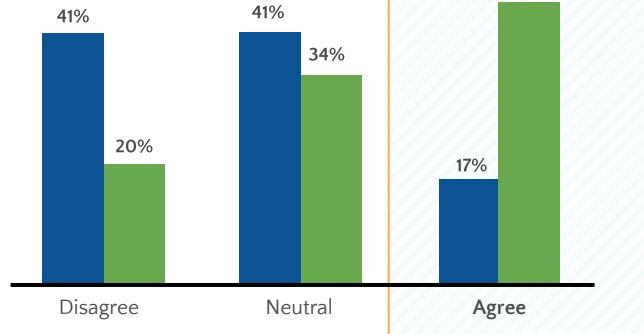
## Key findings

- Although adblock users express more dissatisfaction about ads than regular users, this does not translate into a negative attitude toward the advertised brand.
- Even when bothered by seeing an ad, both adblock users and regular users have very similar levels of positivity toward the advertised brand.
- Surprisingly, regular users who are bothered by an ad express slightly *greater* negativity towards the advertised brand than corresponding adblock users.

### WHEN USERS ARE BOTHERED BY ADS

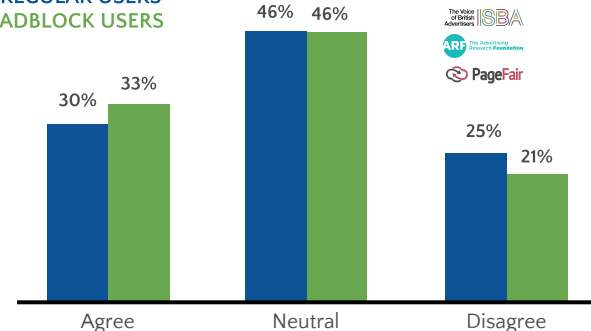
"It bothers me that I have seen a picture ad from [brand]."

REGULAR USERS  
ADBLOCK USERS



Of those who are bothered when they see an ad:  
"I have a positive attitude toward [brand in ad]"

REGULAR USERS  
ADBLOCK USERS



# Brands are not blamed

Adblock users apportion less blame towards brands than regular users.

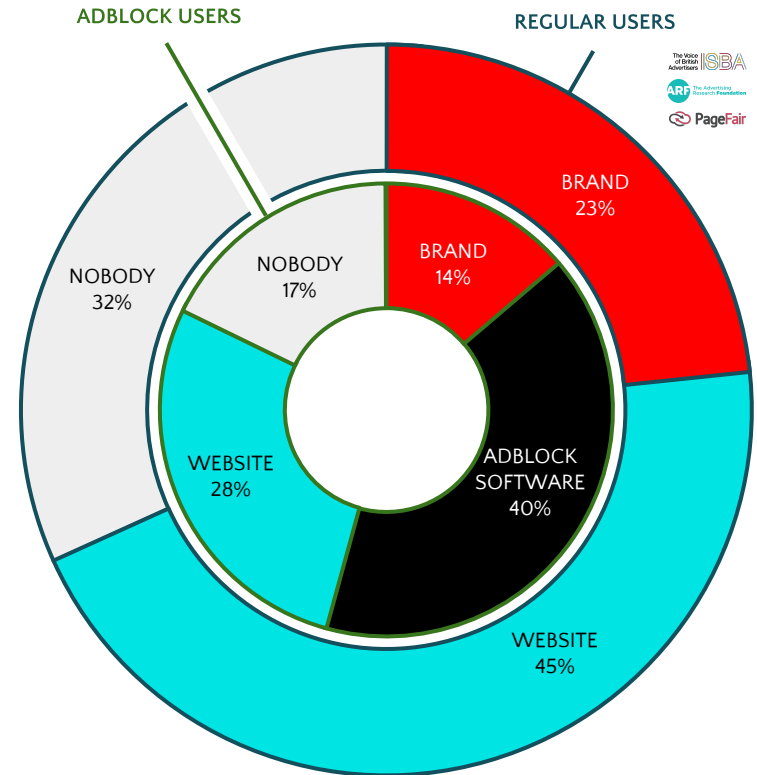
## Key findings

- Among people who expressed a negative attitude to seeing an ad, adblock users are significantly less likely than regular users to blame the brand that was advertised.
- Adblock users apportion more blame to their adblock software than to publishers or advertisers.
- People who are bothered by seeing an ad blame the brand less than any other party, irrespective of whether they use an adblocker or not.

## Analysis

Adblock users blame brands less than normal-users. In most cases they blame their adblock software. They blame publishers to a far lesser extent, and advertised brands the least.

Attribution of blame by people bothered by ad



# Methodology & references

1. Screenshots were created of three popular and politically diverse news websites
  - a. Nytimes.com (Alexa traffic rank 3rd) Foxnews.com (ranked 6th) and News.yahoo.com (ranked 7th) were selected.
  - b. Standard display ads were selected from the [MOAT advertising archive](#), selecting an instantly recognizable mainstream brand.
  - c. Two screen shots were created for each site. The first version showed the front page of the site, on which an advertisement was immediately visible above the fold (in other words, the advertisement was immediately visible without scrolling down the page). The second version was exactly the same as the first except it also showed the presence of an adblock extension as an icon beside the address bar.
  - d. To avoid the hazard of political bias in respondents' reactions we used archived versions of the front page of each site from the previous year. For each site we built the screenshots using versions captured by The Internet Archive, restoring any missing features as necessary.
  - e. The survey was conducted over nine days using Survey Monkey in late February and early March 2017 using Survey Monkey's United States panel.
2. Only completed responses (N = 2,371) were analyzed.
3. Respondents were categorized as adblock users and non-adblock users.
  - a. Adblock users were categorized as those who answered both affirmatively to the question, "Do you currently use adblocking software on your desktop or laptop computer? Adblocking is defined as using a browser extension to prevent ads from displaying in web pages and who answered," and negatively to

the question, "Is the name of the adblocking extension that you currently use missing from the following list: Adblock, Adblock Plus, uBlock Origin, uBlock, Adblock Pro?" This yielded 18% adblock users, which is the same percentage of US adblock use reported in [PageFair's State of the Blocked Web 2017 Report](#).

4. Based on their choice of site and categorization as an adblock user or non-user respondents were shown screenshots and asked the following:
  - a. Question: Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with this webpage? Options: Very satisfied / Somewhat satisfied / Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied / Somewhat dissatisfied / Very dissatisfied

Question: It bothers me when I am shown a "cookie notice" that I have to click. Options: Strongly disagree / Disagree / Neutral / Agree / Strongly agree

Question: I have a positive attitude toward [the brand]. Options: Strongly disagree / Disagree / Neutral / Agree / Strongly agree

Question: It bothers me that I have seen a picture ad (from [brand]). Options: Strongly disagree / Disagree / Neutral / Agree / Strongly agree

Question: Who would you blame for this? Options: [named brand] [named website] / Nobody / Your adblocker (adblocker option where appropriate)