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The Effects of Web Advertisements and Gender Differences on the Conventional College Student's Attention Span

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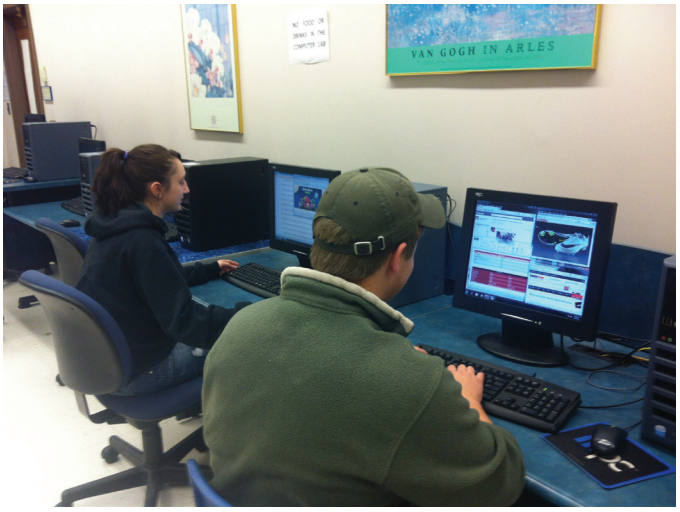
Web advertisements saturate the online environment, making the completion of schoolwork online a daunting chore filled with distractions. Undergraduate college students, the target audience of many advertising companies, take on this task daily. A 2004 study by S. Shyam Sundar and Sriram Kalyanaraman suggests that advertisements, especially those with animation, distract users from the task at hand. By studying this topic, students can be made aware of how damaging online ads can be on their grades, task performance, and reading comprehension. The present research proposal investigated the effects of two types of web advertisements—animated and static—on attention with the hypothesis being that animated advertisements would be more effective at capturing a participant's attention. Gender differences in attention given to online advertisements were also researched. In 2007, Thomas R. Baird, Russell G. Wahlers, and Crystal K. Cooper found that females have a higher retention level than males for advertisements containing emotional content. This led to the hypothesis that female participants would pay more attention to the ads than their male counterparts. The research method requires that all participants be tested for performance on multiple choice questions unrelated to the advertisements simultaneously appearing on the computer screen. An eye-tracking device will be used to record participants' visual attention to the ads. It is predicted that the mere presence of advertisements would have a negative impact on task performance.

Research advisor Phuong Do writes, "The topic of web advertisements and how they serve as distracters to college students when working online is a highly relevant and important area of research. It was a great experience to mentor Michelle Seyk as she developed her research proposal, incorporating differences between genders into the experiment."



Purdue University Calumet students Mariah Hood and Ryan Rosenbrock get distracted by online advertisements while working in the computer lab.

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