

DigiAd Good



MEASURING WHAT MATTERS
REBECCA JENKINS AND JANICE DENEGRİ-KNOTT

Foreword

Six years ago in the top room of a London pub, we planted the seed for the foundation of Purpose Disruptors with a question: if advertising drives unsustainable consumption that contributes to climate change, then what do those of us working in the industry do about that? Can we continue to drive growth and consumption indefinitely with no regard for planetary boundaries?

We know that asking challenging questions that disrupt the status quo can drive change.

What if digital advertising were no longer contributing to a polarised and distracted society but played a positive role in people's lives? Not just sell more, not just drive clicks, but genuinely contribute to wellbeing? I know the first step to a better outcome is to imagine a different future. A future we want for ourselves, our work and our society.

That ambition to surface a question that creates a sense of possibility is what brought me to DigiAdGood, and why I am proud to introduce this whitepaper.

The problem is clear. Digital advertising has become trapped by its own metrics. Click-through rates, impressions, dwell time, likes. These metrics are designed to measure attention, not value. In optimising for these proxies, the result is not just frustration and irrelevance for audiences. It is inflated media spend, diminishing returns, and eroded trust in advertising. Vanity metrics have become the industry's compass, and they have been pointing in the wrong direction.

But this whitepaper points towards a way out.



Rob McFaul

**Co-founder,
Purpose
Disruptors**



Wellbeing in-the-moment

A concept grounded in positive psychology and behavioural science offers something the industry urgently needs: a metric that puts human experience at the heart of the work. One that asks not just "did they see it?" but "did this leave them in a better place?" In doing so, it begins to close the gap between what is good for the industry and what is good for people. That misalignment, as these pages make clear, is actively harmful to individuals, society, brands, and the planet.

Advertising influences culture and reaches billions daily. That is an extraordinary responsibility and an extraordinary opportunity.

If we start measuring what matters, rather than valuing what we already measure, everything changes.

This whitepaper is an invitation to begin. We hope you will accept it.

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DigiAdGood is
driven by a
simple but
powerful
belief: *digital
advertising can
and should work
in ways that are
better for people,
not just
performance
metrics.*

About us

Digital Advertising Metrics for Good

By combining evidence-led insights with collaboration across the advertising ecosystem and academia, DigiAdGood is working to develop new, wellbeing-orientated metrics that better align business goals and audience wellbeing.

It's a step toward a more responsible, sustainable future for digital advertising: one where success is measured not only by engagement, but by the positive impact it creates for businesses, individuals and society.

The authors

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The Funder

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Why a wellbeing metric?

What if digital advertising supported people to thrive, to pursue and achieve their goals, to live according to their values, to experience pleasure? What if digital advertising contributed positively to happiness and wellbeing, and actually made people feel better?

We know that operating in the attention economy is difficult. It leaves advertisers competing for peoples' attention in ways that often distract, frustrate and feel irrelevant or intrusive. Existing engagement metrics and targets related to them are the primary cause of this because they incentivise attention grabbing messaging and are poorly connected with what is good for brands, people and the planet.

In this whitepaper we call for the inclusion of a wellbeing metric to evaluate digital advertising. To do this, we identify how wellbeing can most appropriately be applied to advertising via the concept of **wellbeing in-the-moment**. We provide insights from our DigiAdGood study that measured the impact of experiences with social media advertising content on wellbeing outcomes, and outline ways forward for a **wellbeing first** advertising industry movement.



Our research found that social media advertising content has the power to positively and negatively impact in-the-moment wellbeing. When ad content aligns with one or more components of wellbeing, wellbeing is supported and enhanced, and if ad content can meet all three components of wellbeing-in-the-moment, this has the most positive impact on wellbeing outcomes. When ad content disrupts these alignments, producing negative advertising experiences, wellbeing suffers.

Advertising has the power to positively contribute to people's daily lives, through supporting their goals, providing positive emotional experiences and enabling them to live in-line with their values, but existing metrics do not support such an approach. If we **start measuring what matters**, rather than valuing what we measure, then advertising can be a force for good.

Help us to change digital advertising for good, by measuring what really matters.

The
Problem:

*Current
digital
advertising
effectiveness
metrics are at
odds with
what matters
to people and
to brands.*

THE PROBLEM

Existing metrics prioritise measuring engagement outcomes, such as views, likes, and click-through rates, which incentivise poor-quality, attention-grabbing content that has been linked to a more polarised, distracted, anxious and unhappy society¹. Engagement metrics lose sight of, and even violate, brand values and human values².

Engagement metrics have been questioned by the industry itself³, dubbed unclear and unreliable forms of measurement⁴. Pursuing engagement metrics not only prioritises engagement over the quality of user interactions, but perpetuates a lack of understanding of human attention and engagement^{2,5}, leads to ineffective ad spend⁶, an erosion of trust in advertising⁷ and contributes to a decline in wellbeing¹.

Broadening incentives within the digital advertising eco-system to be more values-based enables inclusion of wellbeing metrics that can contribute to the creation and measurement of advertising effectiveness in responsible ways. Achieving this will enable brands and advertisers to measure what matters and consumers to pursue what matters to them rather than be distracted from it.





I. *Digital ad metrics are not a true measure of human engagement or of ad effectiveness.*

Existing metrics measure only visible actions that correspond to approximately 10% of engagement, which means that **90% of engagement is not captured** (i.e., emotional responses, personal meaning-making, and alignment with values or goals)^{8,9}.

The prioritization of superficial engagement (vanity metrics) over genuine connection and long-term value leads to a **disconnect between what is measured and what truly matters for brand success**. Metrics that rely on visible interactions with content on social media do not necessarily indicate higher levels of interest nor reflect true engagement¹⁰. They also don't show what may be driving engagement. The Centre for Humane Technology and Jonathan Haidt, in his book 'The Anxious

Generation', for example, tell us that high engagement may actually mean a high number of very anxious users and so the potential harms related to existing metrics are not apparent or considered. It is not just commentators, academics and critics arguing this line - attention expert Karen Nelson-Field notes:

"contemporary measurement methods provide little insight into human engagement or the true effectiveness of brand visibility."⁶

While this acknowledges the need to better align industry practice with human experience, the emphasis remains on how to get and then measure attention to align with business goals. The problem with this, as Tech Philosopher James Williams¹ reminds us, is that **business and human goals are misaligned** and so the potential outcomes for individuals and their wellbeing are overlooked with a preference for capturing and retaining attention.



2. *Digital ad metrics contribute to ineffective ad spend*

While global investment in digital advertising has grown by 400% since 2008 (from \$63 billion to \$333 billion), top advertisers experienced an average growth rate of only 3%⁶. This discrepancy may be due to many digital ads failing to genuinely engage their intended audiences. Although estimates vary, recent research by VCCP⁶ found that approximately **75% of technically viewable ads are served to people who aren't actually paying attention**. Metrics that prioritise what is easiest to capture over what truly matters risk legitimising ineffective spend, encouraging short-term optimisation at the expense of long-term growth. In this context, the industry's continued reliance on vanity metrics may be contributing directly to inflated media investment with diminishing returns, rather than supporting advertising's strategic role in building brands, trust and sustainable value.

Due to the ongoing digitalisation of advertising, since 2006 short-term ads have been on the rise^{11,12} but there is a growing industry movement questioning the value of short-term, performance-based advertising centred around vanity metrics. Many are **revalorising advertising strategies that can foster meaningful brand relationships that can result in mental**

availability and emotional vibrancy.^{13,14} Metrics which prioritise measurable but short-term results have resulted in the delivery of ads that highlight functional features in pursuit of quick activations and measurable ROI, but which do not have an enduring impact on building strong consumer-brand relationships. They have, according to ad effectiveness expert Peter Field¹¹, encouraged short-termism by incentivising the delivery of platform-friendly ads built to elicit immediate and measurable responses:

“If all your measures of success are short-term metrics then inevitably there’s bias towards the kinds of media that deliver most powerfully in those timeframes... It’s part of the reason why the digital world has promoted short-term metrics so enthusiastically. It plays to their strengths. It’s natural. And they’ve certainly fuelled this obsession with short-termism.”¹¹

3. *Vanity metrics erode trust in advertising*

Trust is a pressing issue of concern within the UK advertising industry. Public trust in advertising has been growing in recent years, with the 2025 Credos Trust Tracker showing that 40% of the UK public trust advertising – an increase of 10% since 2022^{15,16}. Consumer trust of social media ads is significantly lower than traditional media¹⁷, with only 1 in 5 consumers having trust in them³. **This dilution of trust is linked to vanity metrics which prioritise short term gains** – a like, a click-through, a sale – over longer-term goals. As Sir John Hegarty has cautioned, in recent years the industry has ruthlessly pursued a salesmanship model of advertising rather than one seeking to build trust in the long term:

“There are two types of advertising.

1. Salesmanship.

2. Showmanship.

The first is about winning a sale in the short term. The second is about building trust in the long term. In recent years, we’ve ruthlessly pursued (1), and overlooked (2)”.¹⁸

Pressure to meet targets for vanity metrics can incentivise advertisers to create content that is predatory, attention-grabbing and poor quality^{1,2}, leading to a flood of irrelevant or intrusive ads. Even personalised or targeted ads that intend to be relevant result in distrust due to privacy violations, resulting in **advertising being perceived as ‘creepy’¹⁹ and deceptive²⁰**. Because existing metrics do not consider the quality of engagement or impact on customer relationships, they can erode trust. Something needs to change.

4. *Metrics do not align with what matters to people*

Metrics lose sight of values – of the things that matter to people. A wealth of wellbeing research tells us what matters to people: connection with self, others and nature, a better work-life balance, working towards goals (whether big or small), experiencing things that bring happiness, a sense of autonomy, fulfilment and purpose^{21,22}. And people want brands to help them: **72% of consumers want brands to improve their health and wellbeing**, while **70% of consumers want brands to do good for society and the planet**²³.

Brands too, have values and a mission or purpose. Beyond ROI, continued growth and satisfying shareholders, brand missions set out to make positive contributions in various ways. These values require genuine, transparent and consistent messaging and actions¹⁴ that are not served by vanity metrics and may consequently get overlooked. Returning to what matters to people and to brands is important because recent research tells us that **45% of people have stopped buying from brands that do not share their values**, and **46% have stopped buying from brands that don't respect society or the planet**²³. People are voting with their wallets.



THE PROBLEM

In neglecting values, engagement-based advertising is directly linked to the commodification of attention that infringes on individual autonomy, the freedom to define and pursue personal goals¹ and fundamentally affects wellbeing²⁴. At present, the metrics shaping digital advertising and the platforms' ecosystems they inhabit are convenient ways of equating usage and engagement with success. However, these outcomes are not always aligned with people's values. Current metrics, as the Centre for Humane Technology² concludes, are misaligned with this deeper mission, because often, the metrics themselves are deemed to be the mission:

"Many companies equate simple, convenient metrics like usage and engagement with success. But usage and engagement are often at odds with widely accepted social values...Instead of metrics being in service to a deeper mission, we often treat metrics as mission..."²

The need for alignment between human and business goals continues to be highlighted as the role and ethics of AI are increasingly questioned within the advertising industry and more broadly²⁵.



**In short:
What we are
measuring is
harming people,
society, businesses
and the planet.**

THE PROBLEM

The harms cannot be overstated



People

Many people believe they're in full control of their attention when using social media or video platforms, but in reality, platform design shapes behaviour. These interfaces are engineered to keep us hooked, constantly tweaked to be harder to resist. Advertising is at the heart of this^{1,2}.

Society

Many societal challenges we face are by-products of digital advertising business models and associated engagement metrics that are bad for us⁴² – that perpetuate the misalignment of human and business goals¹. The role and ethics of AI within the ad industry may further this misalignment and have an adverse impact on wellbeing²⁵.

Businesses

Vanity metrics focus on the short-term. They don't help brands fulfil their missions. They don't necessarily help brands fulfil campaign objectives or improve profit margins. They don't focus on what is important for brands long term (e.g. loyalty, reputation). Brands and advertisers become slaves to metrics that materially impact the function and impact of digital advertising.

The Planet

The rapid expansion of AI threatens to hinder net-zero goals and environmental pledges to which many in the ad industry have committed (e.g. via Purpose Disruptors, Conscious Advertising Network). Its energy consumption and carbon emissions, use of water and potentially hazardous e-waste are all factors that can be overlooked in the name of progress or efficiency⁴⁵. Yet, the knock-on effects of the assault on our attention and declining cognitive abilities means an impaired societal ability to tackle these very challenges^{1, 42}.

“Human attention is the stuff out of which we care for our selves, our communities and our planet. When it is fractured and polluted, all forms of life suffer”⁴²

Our
Solution:
*wellbeing in-
the-moment.*
*The missing
metric.*

OUR SOLUTION

Let's measure *what we value*, not value what we measure

Social media advertising business models are central to individual and societal problems of the attention economy¹. While much of this may be platform-based, advertisers can demand better practices from platforms so that they, too, become more mindful of delivering experiences which contribute to, rather than detract from, people's wellbeing.

Change is afoot.



OUR SOLUTION

Major brands are reassessing their presence on social media platforms whose environments are associated with toxicity, harmful content, or addictive engagement patterns. On X (formerly Twitter), Apple, Disney, IBM, Coca-Cola, and Uber have paused or withdrawn advertising in response to rising hate speech and weakened moderation²⁶. Importantly, **pressure from brands can lead to change**. A good example is the Stop Hate for Profit boycott in July 2020, when more than 1,000 advertisers, including Verizon, Diageo, Ford, Target, Unilever, and Coca-Cola, paused spending to protest Meta's failure to curb harmful content^{27,28} and led to Meta introducing new brand-safety tools²⁹. Together, these developments signal a broader recalibration in which brands are becoming more cautious about funding platforms that tolerate toxic content.

The next challenge is **harnessing the collective power of brands to help dismantle the principles of addiction wired into platform design**², so that they can create healthier digital media ecosystems where **wellbeing outcomes are genuine and central concerns**.

To do so now demands a fundamental shift where long-term strategically valued goals can be served while enhancing wellbeing outcomes for audiences. At present, digital advertising effectiveness is determined by platforms that prioritise immediate responses which are not always aligned with what matters to people and brands. However, advertisers have the power to create advertising and measure its effectiveness in responsible ways that (begin to) address the problems and harms of the attention economy.

We propose an approach to wellbeing and its measurement that enables advertisers and brands to **understand the impact of their advertising on peoples' wellbeing**. By creating a metric that measures the impact of digital advertising on wellbeing, **a more responsible, human-centred approach to digital advertising is possible**.

**Create
healthier
digital media
ecosystems,
where
wellbeing
outcomes are
genuine and
central
concerns.**

OUR SOLUTION

Wellbeing *in-the-moment*



We propose 'wellbeing in-the-moment'. It is based on an experiential approach to wellbeing that is **grounded in positive psychology and behavioural science**. We draw particularly from the work of Martin Seligman and Paul Dolan.

Wellbeing in-the-moment focuses on and captures lived experiences and momentary reports of wellbeing³⁰. Traditional approaches regard wellbeing as something that is relatively stable over time and rely on overall evaluations of life satisfaction³¹. Whereas an 'in-the-moment' approach enables us to **understand how everyday experiences and activities** – like going on social media, interacting with advertising content – **contribute, or not, to wellbeing outcomes**.

Wellbeing in-the-moment consists of three components:

I. *Pursuing good*

Experiencing 'feelings of fulfilment, meaning and worthwhileness'³². Pursuing good is all about purpose, which is aligned to values or what matters to people. Purpose provides goals that guide and direct action. Example: to be a nurturing parent. For brands/advertisers, this means aligning to your consumers values to enable them to pursue their purpose.

2. *Doing good*

Directing time and attention towards or engaging in activities that matter and interest people, specifically setting and achieving goals. Example: using social media to find interesting activities to do with a child. For brands/advertisers, this means providing ways that personal goals can be supported and achieved via your brand.

3. *Feeling good*

Experiencing pleasure and positive emotions and avoiding negative emotions. Example: ad content is deemed pleasing/enjoyable. For brands/advertisers, this mean stimulating positive emotions and experiences.

OUR SOLUTION



The sentiments (feelings) associated with the components of wellbeing – pursuing good (purpose), doing good (participating in goal directed activity) and feeling good (pleasure) – **are always experienced ‘in the moment’⁵²**. Hence, we can measure wellbeing in-the-moment in relation to a particular activity, whether it be taking the dog for a walk, going to the supermarket, watching a film, or experiencing advertising content. Within the DigiAdGood study, we focused on how the social media experience, and specifically experiences with advertising content on social media, enables pursuing good, doing good and feeling good to be experienced. This approach provides a measure of the impact that specific ad content has on an individual’s wellbeing.

Support for a wellbeing-orientated approach is evident in both academic and industry research.

When we break this down into the three components of wellbeing-in-the-moment we see **commercial evidence for the value of brands adopting a wellbeing orientated approach:**

Pursuing Good: *aligning with human values*

- 84% of consumers are more likely to buy from brands that align with their values and 55% will stay loyal⁵⁵.
- Ads that inspire the pursuit of dreams and meaning (i.e. purpose) lead to positive attitudes toward the ad + subsequent enhanced brand attitudes + purchase intentions and enhanced wellbeing⁵⁴.
- Top rated meaningful brands are not just good for the world but have stronger bottom lines: +294% stock performance²⁵.

Doing Good: *enabling goal pursuit and achievement*

- People respond better to messages that align with their goals, leading to positive perceptions, attitudes and intentions vis-à-vis the ad and brand^{55, 36}.
- Pursuing intrinsic goals (linked to values/purpose) via consumption leads to a 13-16% increase in wellbeing outcomes³⁷.
- Brands that help people take a healthier approach to their lives perform 38% better than the average brand²³.

Feeling Good: *evoking positive feelings*

- When people feel positive, they are positive about advertising - brands need to create moments of enjoyment and relaxation³⁸.
- Ads with the best emotional response generate a 23% uplift in sales³⁹.
- Ads that evoke strong emotions leave viewers with positive feelings⁴⁰.

DigiAdGood:
*Research
findings*

DIGIADGOOD STUDY

Led by Bournemouth University, DigiAdGood was conducted by a group of interdisciplinary researchers from the UK and Europe and supported by UK-based industry partners Purpose Disruptors, Hearst and Mindshare.

Sample:

- 51 UK adults
- 18–63 years
- 38 female, 13 male
- Mainly heavy social media users – using social media multiple times a day.

Methods:

- 51 baseline questionnaires
- 562 in-the-moment mini-surveys
- 51 follow up interviews



DIGIADGOOD FINDINGS

The project's aim was to **measure the impact of experiences with social media advertising content on wellbeing in-the-moment**. When we better understand this, we get closer to the creation of a wellbeing metric. Through our data analysis and interpretation, we identify **five 'conditions' that social media advertising content needs to provide** in order to have a positive impact on wellbeing in-the-moment:

1. Enable people to **pursue good** - align with purpose/values
2. Help people to **do good** - align with goals
3. Make people **feel good** - generate positive emotional experiences
4. Foster alignments between pursuing, doing and feeling good to maximise wellbeing outcomes
5. Avoid disrupting wellbeing alignments (that result in negative experiences) via:
 - Incongruence with purpose and goals
 - Contextual conditions - frequency and timeliness of ads



Our research shows that **positive experiences with ad content on social media stems from alignment between the three elements of wellbeing in-the-moment** (figure 1): pursuing good, doing good and feeling good. Ads may align with one or more of the elements. Where an ad aligns with all three, we see this as the most positive impact on wellbeing, because the experience addresses wellbeing in-the-moment in its entirety.

Negative experiences with ad content on social media stem from incongruencies emerging between ads and consumers' desire to pursue and do good, and context-based conditions - particularly those related to frequency and timeliness. This is where ads have a negative impact on wellbeing in-the-moment. Even where an ad may be in alignment with pursuing good (purpose) or provide opportunities to participate in achieving a goal (doing good), **conditions can disrupt the alignment, producing a negative experience and outcome.**

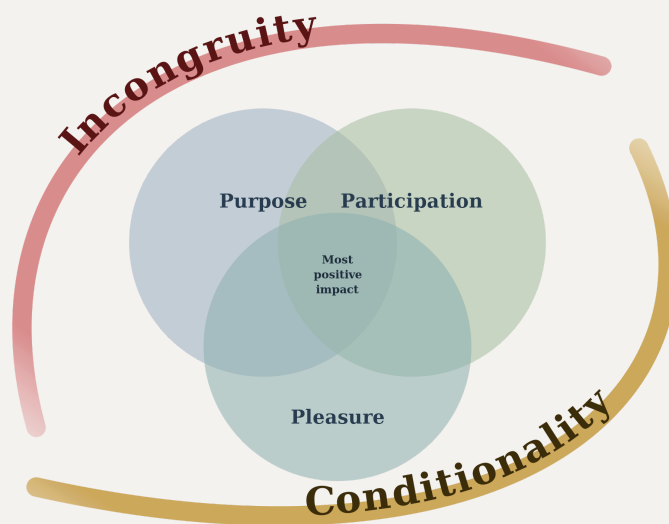


Figure 1: Wellbeing in-the-moment framework

As part of the in-the-moment mini-surveys, participants took screenshots of the ad content they experienced and elaborated on their experiences in the interviews. We present these **screenshots alongside quotes from the interviews and open-text responses** in the mini-surveys to help **bring experiences to life** and to capture them in more concrete ways.

I. Enable people to *pursue good* – align with *purpose and values*

Purpose-related responses and experiences – or ads that enable people to pursue good – provide insight into participants' perceptions of the meaningfulness of social media advertising content. Purpose is experienced when congruency between ad content and an individual's purpose (values) was noted, producing a positive experience with ads. Ads that align with purpose tend to be seen as helpful or useful.

Overall, positive ad experiences are considered:



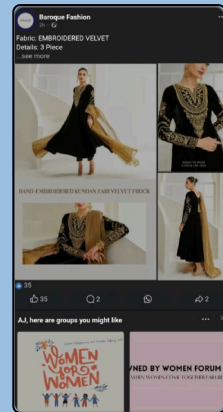
** mean averages*

The **qualitative data provide insight into experiences of how ad content aligns with purpose and values.** This is not necessarily about shared values or brand-self congruence⁴¹ but recognising how ad content relates to one's values.



Ali, 25-34: *"It represents my culture. I love wearing Pakistani dresses, jewellery, shoes. I guess that's why it's meaningful to me. I follow this brand Baroque Fashion, because their dresses are absolutely gorgeous. So I guess it's also meaningful because I actually follow this page. I know about their business."*

The brand and style of clothing relate to cultural values and heritage and the ad is therefore meaningful.



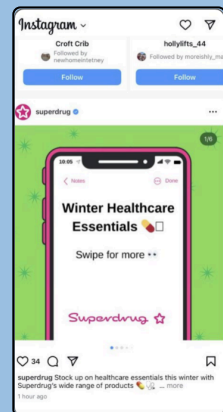
Maisy, 26: *"So, the advert showed how to make an Ambertini, or how to make a Sasha Rita. So, it was gifts for friends, and I think that was related to my values on being loyal to friends. I really love gift giving, and I like to think a lot of time I like to get personalized gifts and really make an effort on stuff."*

Cocktail Book ad aligns with purpose to be a loyal friend. Gifting meaningful gifts is connected to values of loyalty.



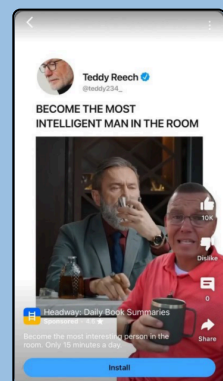
Ros, 42: *"It's making sure that my family is having the best health products and exactly meeting our needs, especially since everyone's suffering with flu.... I think kind of, you know values are kind of supporting the family, making sure everyone's happy and healthy."*

Ad for Superdrug winter cold and flu products is congruent with Ros' family values.



Rob, 40s: *Positive experience interacting with an ad for Headway Daily Book Summaries attributed to his "growth mindset" as someone who is always "wanting to learn more and better myself in any way I can".*

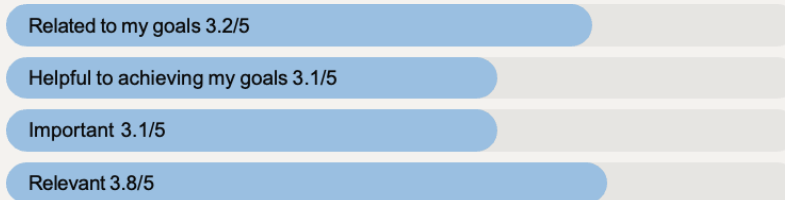
Ad for Headway Daily Book Summaries is aligned with his value regarding self-improvement/self-growth.



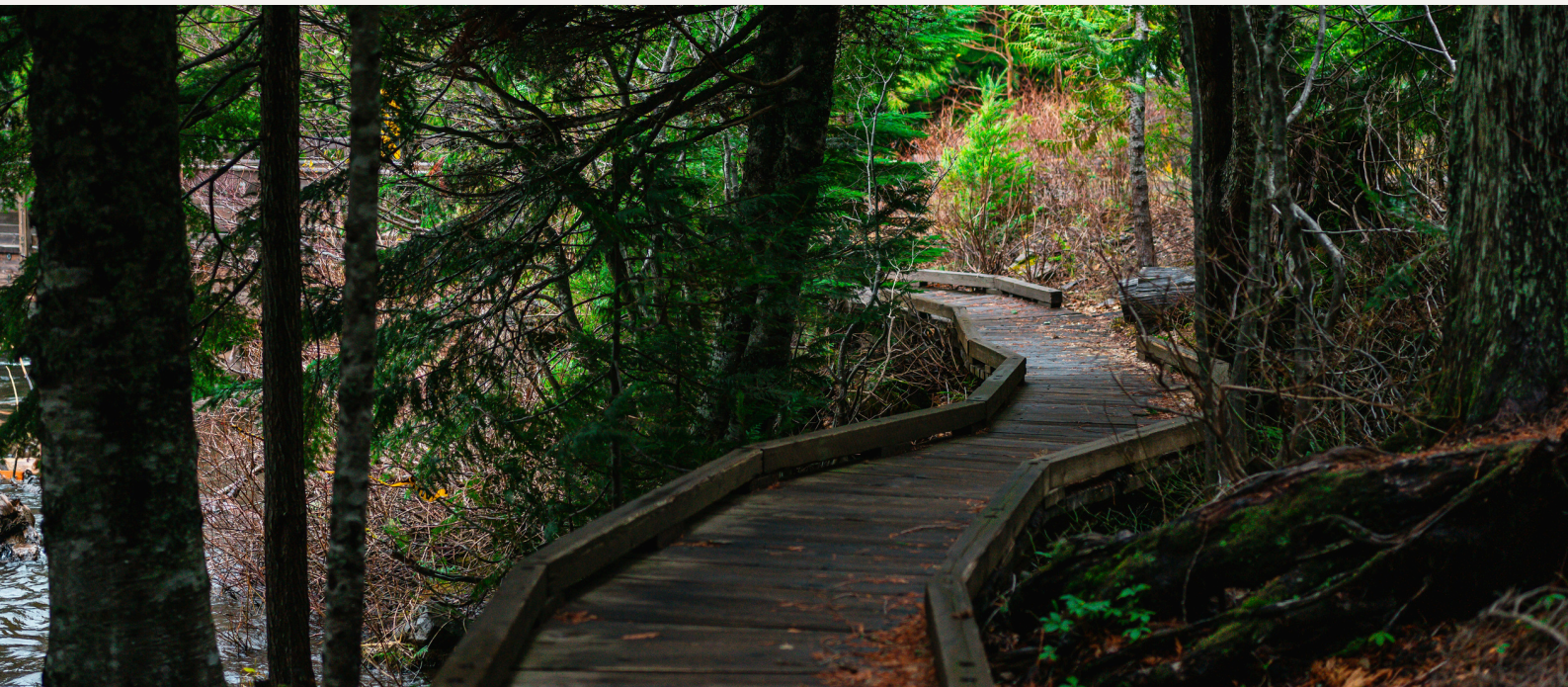
2. Help people to *do good* – align with and enable the *pursuit of goals*

Ads that enable people to ‘do good’ were described in relation to specific, short term goals that participants were working towards. These goals were often related to their purpose (values). Specifically, participants talked about ad content that offered a means to achieve goals through providing inspiration, direction and relevance. These ads are often considered helpful/useful to engage with.

Overall, positive ad experiences are considered:

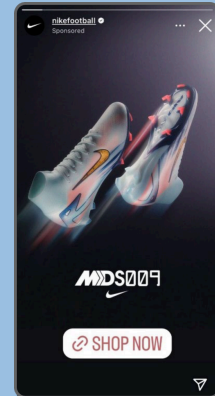


The **qualitative data provide insight into experiences of how ad content aligns with and enables specific goals to be supported or achieved.**



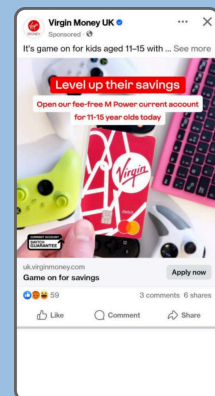
Oscar, 18: *"That's meaningful to me because it directly relates to my goals, my daily life. When I do need boots I won't have to look far."*

Nike ad for football boots is experienced as directly helpful because it aligns with his professional goal of becoming a football coach.



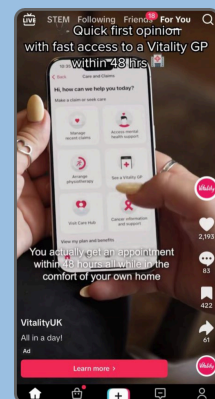
Maria, 52: *"You can use it as a kid's current account. There's no fee, and it was good for them for savings. I was looking around at accounts for my son, and what card he can use now that he's away more, and this account is linked to the gaming."*

Being a good mum is actioned via a goal to support her son gain independence at university. Virgin Money ad helped her locate a suitable banking account for him.



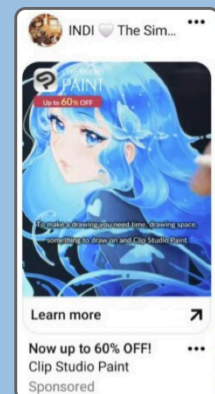
Aliyah, 48: *"The ads I watched helped me make progress toward a few personal goals. The vitality ad showed how easily I could access GP services from home, which aligns with my goal of managing health more conveniently."*

Vitality ad is relevant to her current focus on managing health for herself and her loved ones. Healthiness and timely access to medical care are key goals.



Alina, 22: *"I draw on the side and have been interested in starting a webtoon. Clip Studio Paint is the application I want to purchase as it's more convenient to use for this sector. The ad shows a 60% discount so I'm very happy about that."*

Ad for Clip Studio Paint aligns to life goal of pursuing creative side. Discount on relevant product is encouraging and pleasing.



3. Make people *feel good* - generate *positive emotional experiences*

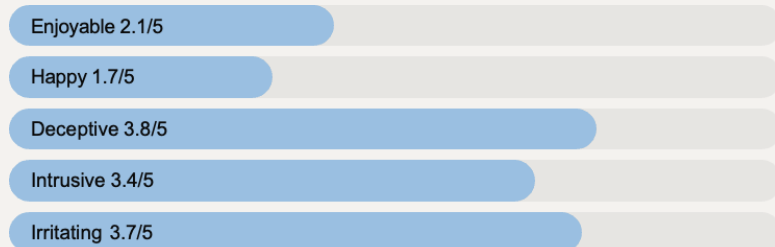
Pleasurable experiences with ad content evoke positive feelings, e.g., happiness, enjoyment, relaxation. Overall, positive ad experiences involve positive emotion/enjoyment:



and a notable absence of negative feelings/responses:



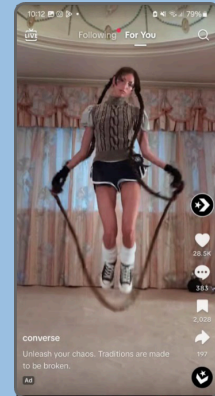
For comparison, with negative reported experiences we see the opposite:



Qualitative data provide detail on how and why certain ad content provokes positive emotional responses, whether via humour, enjoyable and satisfying visual content, product discovery or otherwise.

Alina, 22: "This one just made me laugh because the rope she was skipping with was her hair actually, like, the extensions."

Converse ad



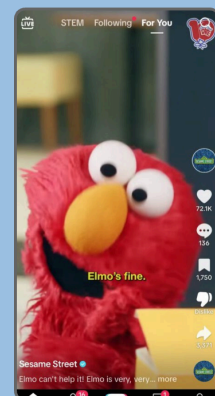
Amelia, 61: "You can watch those videos for hours. It's so mesmerizing. Just watching it, it's just like you could watch it for ages... It's just nice to watch it, and it's just mesmerizing and it's a brand that I like."

Cornish Ware ad



Rita, 53: "This is something that I find very, very positive. I just think this is fun really, easy to read. It just made me smile and I wanted to click on the link and see what was behind that particular one. It's fun. It's easily accessible, it's spreading positivity."

The Sesame Street Company



Ros, 42: "I love a book, so anything that is sharing new stories or authors that I like, I find that really positive. I rarely go to the bookshop, I kind of rely on social media... so for me that ad's quite positive because that's how I find my new books."

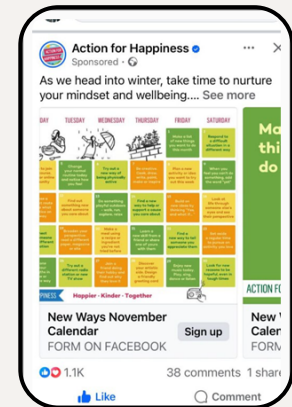
Bookshop.org ad



4. Foster alignments between *pursuing, doing and feeling good* to maximise wellbeing outcomes

The most positive experiences occur when all three components of wellbeing in-the-moment are experienced concurrently. For example, Rita's (53) experience with an *Action for Happiness* ad:

"Action for Happiness is a wonderful company that I really really value, and a force of good for humanity. So when this came out with a whole calendar for December it was just spot on. It gave me positivity towards December. It was showing that every day there's going to be something positive to do. I just thought what a wonderful way of looking at December rather than a season of over consumption and indulgence. At the start of the month it gave a really positive tone for the rest of the month."



Pursuing good (purpose) component:

"It's very important for me that I am useful to other people, and I don't just please myself and be kind to myself, but I'm kind to other people and spread positivity to other people. So this is a way of giving me ideas to do that and to check in what I've done positive today to help other people. So it acts as a bit of a reminder... It reinforces ideas that perhaps I would like reinforcing. So I'm doing the right thing. I'm following the right advice."

Doing good (goals) component:

"Person to humanity as a whole, to helping other people, and, as I said, spreading kindness. They're very simple things to do that don't cost money, and they're very accessible. I usually find that I can do them, or, if not, adapt it slightly. So it was worthwhile having this, because it's something that yeah, I can use this and

you just think that, you know, 'Oh, I'd love to do that', that would be something really nice to do for the local community. So it brings you joy."

Feeling good (pleasure) component:

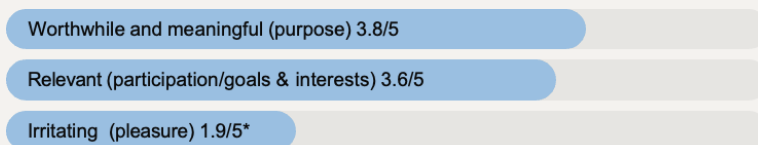
"It's fun because it suggests an activity each day, or it gives you a quote for each day, which is usually something fun to do like a Bingo card."

Key ad dimensions producing positive and negative experiences:

Mini-survey data show a potential indicator of which aspects are most important might be signalled by the **discrepancy between "worthwhile and meaningful," "relevant," and "irritating"**.

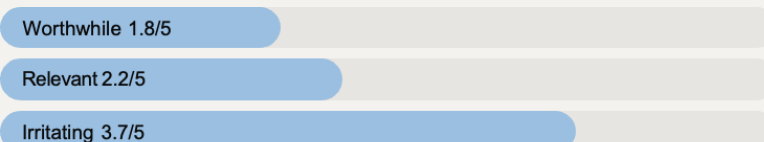
Positive ad experiences are considered worthwhile and meaningful, relevant and not irritating. Negative experiences are not considered worthwhile and meaningful, not relevant and are irritating.

Positive experiences:



*scored low on irritating, indicating positive experiences are not considered irritating.

Negative experiences:



5. *Avoid disrupting wellbeing alignments (that create negative experiences):*

Disruptions to wellbeing alignments occur in two main ways – as a result of incongruencies with pursuing good and doing good, and as a result of contextual conditions – specifically the frequency and timeliness of ads. Ad content needs to **avoid these disruptions in order to avoid negatively impacting wellbeing in-the-moment.**

5a. Incongruencies

When ad content is incongruent with pursuing good (purpose/values) or does not allow for doing good via relevance to goals or supporting accomplishment of goals, negative experiences occur, often resulting in mild frustration (absence of pleasure component).

Examples of incongruence with pursuing good (purpose):

Penny, 28: *"[It is] cosy loungewear but it's just making me buy things and spend more money. I'd much rather spend money on experiences than on material things."*

Bernadette, 58: *"Sometimes I'll see a [political] ad and just think, 'Why are they showing me this? I don't support this person. I don't want to see this.'"*

Aliyah, 48: *"Who puts teddy bears in bondage and gives them to kids? I don't get it. I would not purchase from a brand that puts out ads like that. Did no-one notice how wrong this is?"*

Sian, 21: *"I think SKIMS is a fast fashion company and they market themselves as high end and I don't believe they are. I believe they use a lot. They don't really use good materials, they don't explain how their ethics work or anything like that. So I disagree with SKIMS as a company."*



Examples of incongruence with participation (goals):

Oscar, 18: *"The advert content was not helping me to work towards my goals as it was not entirely relevant to my interests. Buying the shirt won't help me achieve my goal, it's just a lifestyle choice. It's nice to consume, interesting to look at, but in terms of fulfilling my goals, no [it's not helpful]."*

Sarah, 51: *"The chair Yoga ad irritated me because that's for somebody who's less mobile, less active, probably quite a bit older. But I'm physically quite fit so that just didn't relate to me at all."*

Joseph, 20: *"It didn't really help make progress on any goals, the ads were less relevant and more about purchasing from potential brands I might be interested in. Even things like clothing, it's still trying to get me to buy clothes and spend money as opposed to helping me achieve future goals."*

Ali, 25-34: *"Just a Google search that you've done, or a YouTube search you've done, and all of a sudden you start seeing stuff you're like, 'oh, well, I don't, I'm not really particularly interested in this' and some of them are not particularly related. It's not really relevant."*

Ad content that is incongruent with goals indicates **frustration at short-termism from the consumer perspective** and a nod to the misalignment between business and human goals - that social media **ad content is preventing the pursuit of more important life goals.**

5b. Contextual conditions – frequency and timeliness of ads

Frequency: Negative experiences result from the intrusive, repetitive nature of ads. Unnecessary solicitation and repetition cause irritation (absence of pleasure) – this is already understood in industry and academia, but **even where there may be alignment between ad content and purpose (values) or goal pursuit/relevance, frequency/repetition still causes frustrations** and negatively impact wellbeing in-the-moment.

We can see these as **examples of turn-offs to the short-termism that is encouraged by digital platforms that damage brand relationships**. That is, negative experiences do not happen in isolation but have real world impacts on the individual and on a brand's bottom line. These frustrations are also examples of the impact ad content can have in (further) misaligning human and platform/business goals.

Aliyah, 48: *"It was just the fact that it consistently popped up. I'm like, 'leave me alone. Seeing you. I don't want to. I don't care for this'. I think, even if it was a company that I supported and I really love, if you are showing me an ad so many times you just get annoyed and irritated by it. And this, it doesn't go back to my actual beliefs or anything. It's just too much."*

Rita, 53: *"Even if I have an interest but it's really expensive. If it's just, you know, aesthetically pleasing, I'm okay with that but sometimes it's like 'I can't afford this at this point. Please don't show it to me', even though I like to see it."*

Tony, 71: *"When you watch sport, I know it's mainly football, it'll be a betting advert and I have no interest in betting. It's pointless. So I don't really get it. Maybe every second or third video will be a betting advert, it's just annoying."*

Alina, 22: *"I really don't like YouTube ads a lot. I really don't like them, they're very annoying and very repetitive. Every five minutes another ad, and it's the same thing. So it gets annoying."*



Timeliness: Frustration is also caused by the frequency/repetition of ads, especially when action has been taken on a goal, but related ads are still shown – although relevant, the loop has already been closed, resulting in frustration. Timeliness also refers to relevance regarding whether someone is in a position to pursue or achieve a goal.

Amelia, 61: *“The Nutripaw one is a little annoying – I bought from them a couple of times and now the ads are always there even when I tap the cross to hopefully get rid of them.”*

Cathy, 72: *“Since I looked up travel insurance I’ve been inundated with these ads. They’re on my Instagram, they’re on my Facebook. I’ve snoozed them for a while, so at least I’ve got rid of them for a bit.”*

Tina, 56: *“That one was quite annoying. It was constant. Especially as I already have Prima anyway, and I also follow them on social media. So why would you keep trying to promote it to me when I already do it?”*

Oscar, 18: *“I just bought a MacBook, so they’re just advertising something that I already have... It’s not going to help me much when I’ve already got the product, so by show me something I already have I’m not gonna change any decisions that I’ve made.”*

Key
takeaways &
conclusion



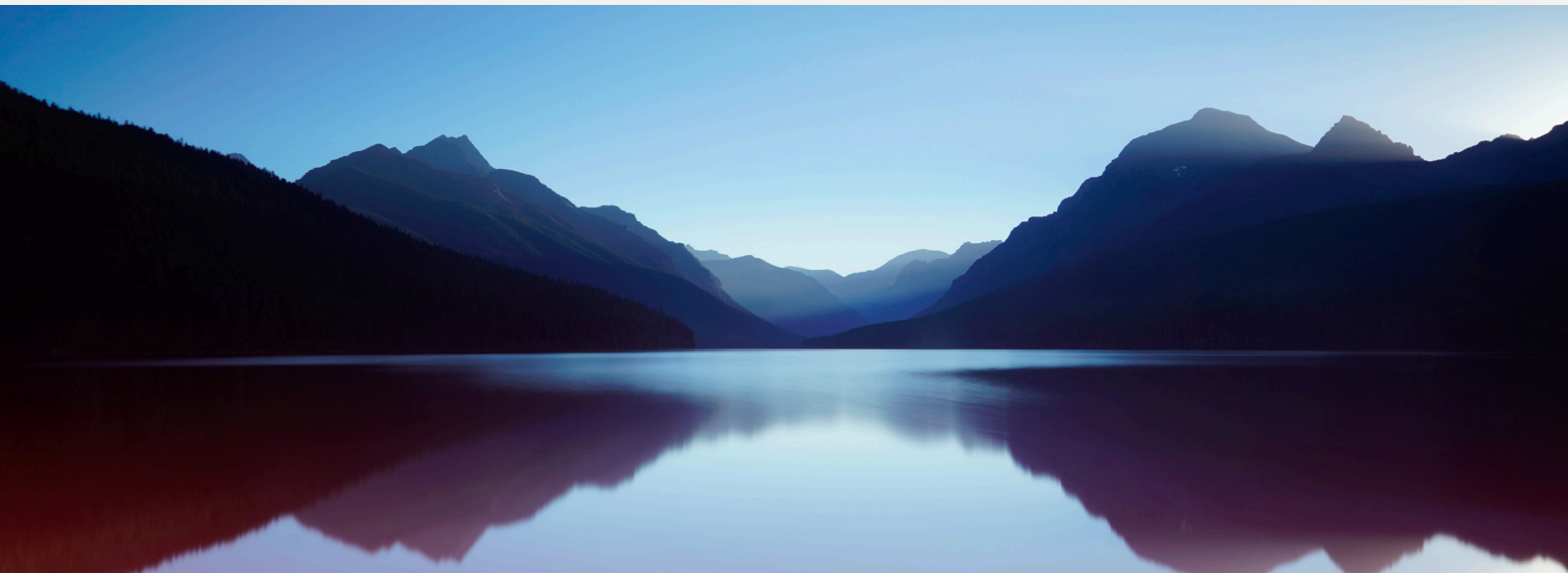
Going forward, understanding what conditions produce positive wellbeing outcomes will pave the way for formulating wellbeing-orientated metrics to account for how digital advertising impacts consumer wellbeing.

It is evident that:

- Ad content should align with one or more elements of wellbeing in-the-moment: pursuing good (purpose/values), doing good (working towards goals) and feeling good (pleasure).
- For the most positive impact on wellbeing, align with all three components.
- Aligning with the components of wellbeing in-the-moment means minimising negative experiences.
- Paying attention to ad frequency (repetition) and timeliness (relevance based on previous action or conditions enabling/preventing action being taken) are important conditions for limiting negative experiences with ad content (and subsequently, negative impacts on wellbeing in-the-moment).

CONCLUSION

Why the ad
industry should
care about
*wellbeing-in-the-
moment* (and
measuring it)



Wellbeing in-the-moment goes beyond superficial engagement and attention to allow measurement of what is truly meaningful to consumers, brands and campaign success. It brings into alignment human and business values and goals – the misalignment of which is shown to be detrimental to individual, societal and environmental wellbeing. We have shown, through our data as well as existing academic and industry research, that people are more likely to support brands that demonstrate a commitment to wellbeing.

Wellbeing metrics will benefit the ad industry by:

i) Increasing trust in advertising in multiple ways:

- People want action not just messaging^{23, 42}. By adopting a new approach to measurement, the industry can show it is taking action, being responsible and tending to the matters that people care about.
- Trust is shown to be built via awareness of regulation – whether government, industry or self-regulation – but also by transparency, consistency and authenticity. A commitment to wellbeing (for people and planet) and for digital brand advertising to be measured according to this means being held to account and demonstrating how brands create value not only for people but for business and wider society. In fact, attachment to brands that actively create value across the entire system – regarded as ‘dynamic brands’ – is 2.3 times higher than the least dynamic brands²³.

ii) Increasing advertising effectiveness, thereby avoiding ad spend wastage:

- Measuring what matters – what aligns with human values and goals and the ways ad content relates to these,

CONCLUSION

provides better measures of effectiveness. Given that social media harms at the level of individual and societal wellbeing are widely known, we might also consider the obligation to better understand the central role of advertising within this, because of the advertising business models that operate social media platforms. Digital advertising should support our intentions, not capture and exploit our attention. Instead, it should endorse the pursuit of our tasks and goals^{1, 2}. Measuring advertising based on its purpose may therefore be considered a moral obligation.

Our intention with this whitepaper is to **start the wellbeing conversation**. We want to highlight the value of prioritising wellbeing for individuals, society and brands. We recognise that numerous organisations (e.g. Conscious Advertising Network, IAB, Advertising Association, Purpose Disruptors) are working for a better, more responsible and accountable industry. Many of these are aligned with DigiAdGood but do not (yet) explicitly address wellbeing as a prominent area deserving of attention. We want to change this, and we believe there is sufficient evidence to justify it.

We see wellbeing as an opportunity for brands to partner with consumers. We need happy, healthy and loyal consumers to have strong performing brands, therefore, **wellbeing is in every brand's interests**. Academic research has made this point for some time:

“Ensuring consumers’ well-being is enhanced through marketing practices, such as advertising, is critical for future success of a brand”⁴⁴

If enhancing wellbeing – for individuals, society, and the planet – is a key brand mission or business target, then wellbeing should be a key advertising effectiveness measure.

Get *involved*

To bring about meaningful change we need your help.

- Share this white paper
- Share our video
- Join the DigiAdGood network
- Become a member of our expert panel
- Help us take next steps

We recognise that the scale of the study and restriction to social media advertising content is insufficient to spark industry change. With this in mind, we are actively developing our next study – a larger study to provide a more robust dataset (c. 1500 participants to provide a representative sample) that applies to digital advertising content more fully and enables us to co-create new wellbeing metrics with industry.

We need to provide tangible proof that when digital advertising is created with wellbeing in mind, it enhances its effectiveness. For this we will be running an A/B test in live campaign settings, comparing standard engagement-optimised executions with wellbeing-optimised alternatives. This testing will require collaboration with partner agencies and brands.

Benefits of participation:

- Early access to new wellbeing metrics and benchmarks
- Leadership in defining the next standards of digital advertising effectiveness
- New tools and principles that can be scaled across clients
- Clear proof that creativity, wellbeing, and performance are mutually reinforcing

If you would like to get involved you can sign up via our website: digiadgood.org or email us: digiadgoodebournemouth.ac.uk

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Appendices



A note on definitions

What we mean by 'ad content'

We define 'ad content' as: *'messages from a product, brand, company or organization'*⁴⁵. Including, for example: Video ads, Story ads, Sponsored influencer posts, Shoppable Ads, Display ads (in-feed or on side bar), ads appearing as trending topics or hashtags, etc.

Research design

DigiAdGood involved three stages of research:

1. A baseline survey to capture demographics, values, social media usage, attitudes towards social media advertising.
2. A one-week Experience Sampling Method study – mini-surveys via the ExpiWell app to capture real-time experiences with social media advertising content, including screenshots. 562 experiences with advertising content on social media were captured, across 51 participants and 8 platforms: Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, TikTok, LinkedIn, X, Pinterest, Snapchat.
3. 51 hour-long follow up phenomenological interviews using data from the one-week experience sampling study to aid memory and elaborate on, further explore values, goals and social media advertising experiences in depth.

Measures used in the study were based on pre-existing validated scales from a variety of published academic studies. Details of these are available at [***digiadgood.org***](https://digiadgood.org).

Participants

Participants were recruited via Hearst UK's Consumer Panel. Each participant received a £50 voucher incentive for taking part.

Further resources and information related to the research are available at [***digiadgood.org***](https://digiadgood.org).

Credits

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