

Ephemeral versus Permanently Accessible Ad Content in Mobile Retargeting

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Abstract

Most customers abandon their online shopping carts without completing a purchase, posing a significant challenge for retailers. We examine the impact of mobile cart retargeting ads delivered via ephemeral app notifications. This advertising format, increasingly adopted by online marketplaces, disappears after being opened. We compare its efficacy with that of the SMS format, in which messages remain permanently accessible. In a preregistered field experiment with a big Asian e-commerce platform, customers were randomly assigned to one of three groups, each receiving: (1) a retargeting ad content via ephemeral app notifications, (2) the same ad content via SMS, or (3) no retargeting ad. We find that ephemeral notifications prompt quicker action, yielding higher CTR and higher purchase incidence. Yet, benefiting from repeated access, SMS recipients make more purchases beyond their abandoned carts through frequent visits, with such a gap widening over time after the ad delivery.

Track: Digital Marketing & Social Media