

YouTube Unfiltered: Why Reach Alone Doesn't Guarantee Impact

A Deep Dive into the Reality of YouTube Usage and Advertising Impact in Switzerland.

A Study by Webrepublic in Collaboration with GfK

webrepublic



Executive Summary

Background & Methodology

YouTube has firmly established itself within the Swiss media landscape: the platform has successfully transitioned from a niche portal to a central pillar of the video ecosystem. Today, it frequently serves as the cornerstone of diversified video strategies.

The platform is characterized by nearly unlimited advertising inventory and impressive reach. However, in such a dynamic environment, maintaining a focus on contact quality is essential. An oversupply of inventory can make it difficult to target high-quality environments precisely. Ultimately, advertising success is driven less by purely quantitative reach and more by whether the message achieved its intended impact on the target audience.

The objective of this study: To bring transparency to YouTube usage in Switzerland. We investigate usage motives, devices, and timing to uncover the secret behind genuine advertising impact. Under what conditions do impressions transform into real-world effectiveness? To address this, we developed a research design based on target group surveys, enriched by insights from our daily operations.

The survey was conducted by GfK using Computer-Assisted Web Interviews (CAWI). It is based on a representative sample of 750 residents in German-speaking Switzerland (ages 15 to 74), recruited via a structured random-quota process.

The practical insights are derived from our ongoing client work



Key Findings

Our study provides insights on multiple levels. On one hand, it shows—through purely data-driven metrics—how YouTube usage varies across different demographics, devices, and times of day.

On the other hand, it examines the usage motives of platform users and provides the foundation for a re-evaluation of YouTube: moving away from a simple reach-driver toward a differentiated ecosystem where user intent determines the value of the inventory.

Usage Motives

Advertising impact occurs where users engage with YouTube content with focus—for example, when they consume content to learn something or to gain deeper knowledge. Impact is significantly lower during unfocused contact—such as when users are seeking passive entertainment or simply have YouTube running in the background. Consequently, YouTube is not always YouTube. Depending on the usage motive and context, advertising performs very differently. Accordingly, it is crucial for advertisers to identify those channels to target those

channels where a deep, focused engagement with the content can be expected.

Usage Duration

YouTube is used intensively: an average of 41 minutes on weekdays and as much as 50 minutes per day on weekends. The youngest age group (15–34 years) shows by far the highest usage intensity, while older users spend significantly less time on the platform.

Usage Timing

The afternoon sees the highest usage by a significant margin—both during the week and on weekends.

Devices

Successful YouTube strategies are based on a balanced multi-device approach that strategically combines reach, usage context, and inventory quality. Ultimately, for users, the specific device is secondary; what matters is the actual content.



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1. Background

YouTube in the Swiss Media Context



1. Background

From Niche Portal to Dominant Video Platform

YouTube has conquered the Swiss media market in record time: from niche portal to video powerhouse. Today, the platform is no longer a supplement, but often the foundation of video strategies.

The numbers speak for themselves: With 2.6 million weekly users (aged 18–59), YouTube leaves both the SRG broadcasters (2.3 million) and the private channels (1.58 million) in the dust. Anyone looking for reach today can no longer ignore YouTube.

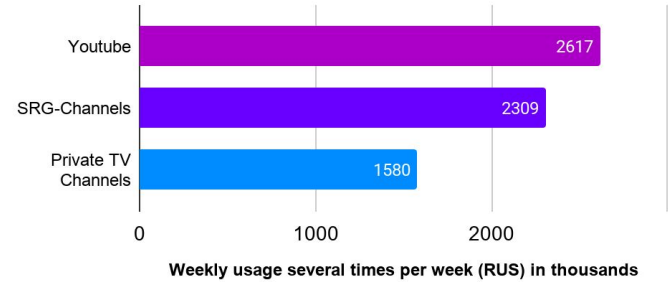


Figure 1.1: YouTube Is the Video Channel with the Widest Reach

Source: WEMF, MACH Strategy, 2025, (Switzerland, ages 18–59)



1. Background

Inventory Is Almost Endless. Impact Isn't.

500 hours of video uploads globally. Per minute. YouTube now offers virtually unlimited advertising space and extreme reach.

But this is precisely where the trap lies: The oversupply leads to a loss of impact. The more inventory is available, the more difficult it becomes to target quality. Where does effective impact come from? Reach alone says nothing about whether an advertising message has actually been received and achieved its intended effect.

The Black Box of Platform Data

A measured impression alone doesn't equate to advertising effectiveness. Yet, that's precisely what common metrics like completion rates suggest. They measure that a video played. What these metrics miss, however, is whether anyone actually watched it and, if so, how deeply they engaged. Perhaps the video was simply playing in the background, and only the audio message was absorbed, not the visuals?

This often leads to miscalculations in media planning: Every measured contact is considered equally valuable, as long as the technology gives the green light. Delivery is equated with effectiveness, even though they are worlds apart. The result is the attention gap – the black hole between technical reach and actual attention. This gap needs to be closed in practical work. The findings of this study are intended to help achieve this.



1. Background

The Data Basis and the Analytical Approach

To make the attention gap tangible, we bridge the gap between technology and psychology: We combine data from our ad recall measurements with independent usage data from GfK.

Actual advertising effectiveness is our guiding principle. It shows us precisely under which conditions reach is not only broadcast but also remembered. In this way, we systematically identify the levers that transform a fleeting contact into a powerful moment.

Objective of This Study

The objective of this study is to make YouTube usage in Switzerland transparent. We are examining usage motives, devices, and timing to get closer to the secret of genuine advertising effectiveness. Under what conditions do impressions translate into real advertising impact?

With these findings, we are laying the foundation for a new era of media planning. We demonstrate that YouTube is not a homogenous reach block, but rather a differentiated inventory system whose success depends significantly on usage motives.



2. Methodology

Research Approach and Data Foundation



2. Methodology

Starting Point and Research Approach

The impetus for this study comes directly from practical experience: In our ongoing advertising effectiveness research with GfK, we observe a recurring pattern in Swiss campaigns. High reach and strong unique reach values do not automatically lead to high ad recall.

The conclusion: Contacts are not the same as effectiveness. But if reach doesn't explain effectiveness – then what does?

Our Hypothesis: It's not the contact itself that determines advertising effectiveness, but rather the context in which that contact occurs. In particular, the user's motivation influences whether advertising is noticed attentively or filtered out into background noise. Accordingly, some video categories and channels are better or worse suited for ad placements.

The basis for testing our hypothesis was a representative GfK panel as well as real-world data on ad recall.



2. Methodology

Study Design

Data was collected by GfK via computer-assisted web interviews (CAWI). A representative sample of 750 people from the German-speaking Swiss resident population (aged 15 to 74) was surveyed, selected using a precise random quota method. This ensures a reliable data basis that accurately reflects the reality of the German-speaking Swiss market.

The survey was conducted along four dimensions. To gain further insights, the results were then merged with insights from Webrepublic's ongoing campaign work.

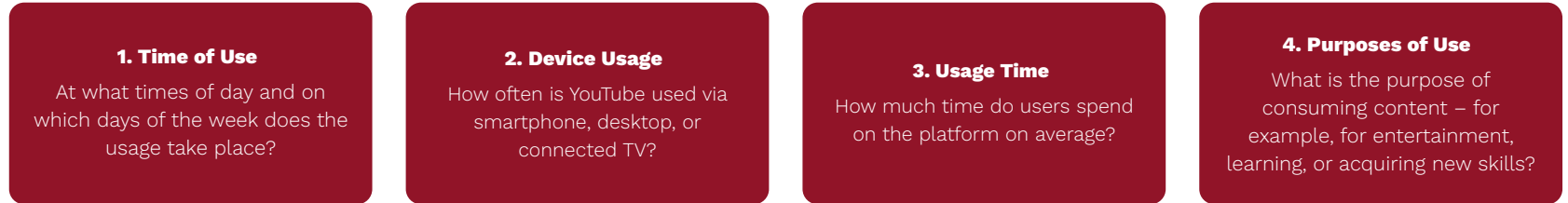


Figure 2.1: Dimensions and Questions of YouTube Usage Examined

Source: GfK Switzerland & Webrepublic, 2025, YouTube Unfiltered – Usage Study Switzerland



3.1. Usage Duration

High Engagement Across All Age Groups



3.1. Usage Duration

High Average Usage Time

The study of average usage time revealed consistently high figures:

In German-speaking countries, users spend an average of **44 minutes per day on YouTube**. While average usage during the week is around 41 minutes per day, it increases to approximately 50 minutes per day on weekends.

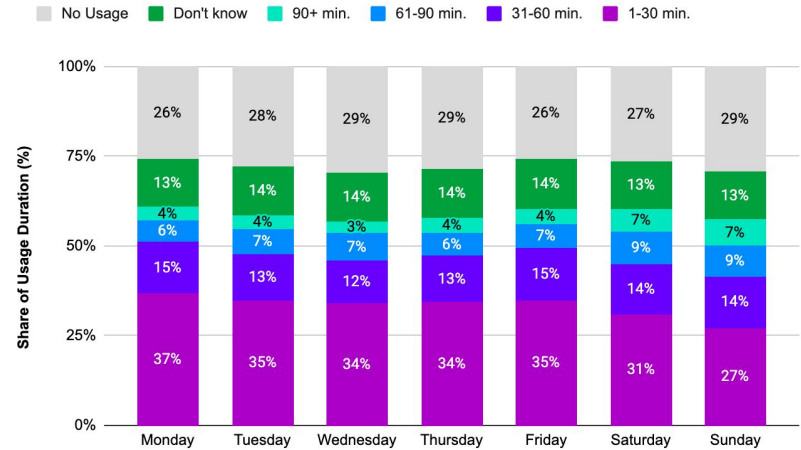


Figure 3.1.1: On Average, 44 Minutes of YouTube Are Watched per Day in German-speaking Switzerland (D-CH)

GfK Switzerland & Webrepublic, 2025, YouTube Unfiltered – Usage Study Switzerland



3.1. Usage Duration

Decreasing Usage Time with Increasing Age

Analyzing different age cohorts reveals a clear gradient in daily usage: Average usage time decreases significantly with age. While the **youngest age group (15–34 years) exhibits by far the highest usage intensity**, older users spend significantly less time on the platform.

This difference is more than just a demographic phenomenon:

It shows that usage—and thus potential advertising contacts—is strongly concentrated in younger target groups. This makes the potential of reaching young target groups via this channel even more attractive for advertisers.

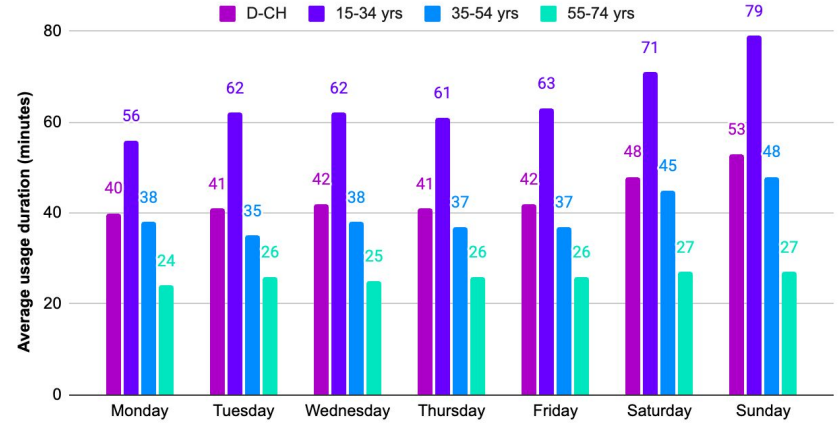


Figure 3.1.2: YouTube Usage Time by Age Group

GfK Switzerland & Webrepublic, 2025, YouTube Unfiltered – Usage Study Switzerland



3.2. Usage Timing

The Afternoon as the New Prime Time



3.2. Usage Timing

Usage Throughout the Day: The Afternoon as a Key Timeframe

Besides the question of how intensively YouTube is used, the timing of that use is crucial. Analyzing the daily usage reveals a clear pattern relevant for media planning.

On weekdays, usage is not primarily concentrated in the evening hours, but rather reaches its peak in the afternoon. Usage is particularly high between 2:00 PM and 5:00 PM.

Around 46% of users consume YouTube content during this period. This puts afternoon usage significantly ahead of morning, midday, or evening usage.

This pattern is evident not only in the overall picture but also at the level of individual weekdays. Only on weekends does usage shift slightly, becoming more spread throughout the day, though it remains at a higher overall level. The fundamental logic of usage, with a clear focus in the afternoon, nevertheless persists.

Figure 3.2.1:
YouTube Is not an Evening or Weekend Medium

Source: GfK Switzerland & Webrepublic, 2025, YouTube Unfiltered – Usage Study Switzerland

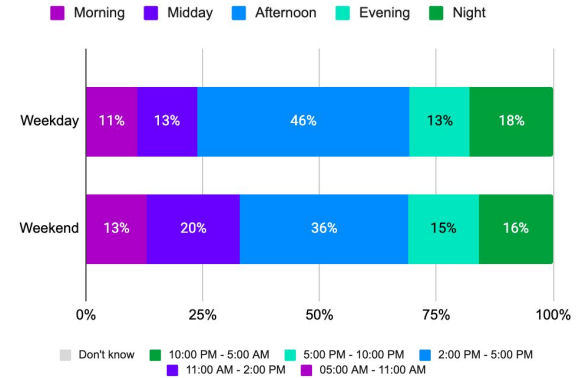
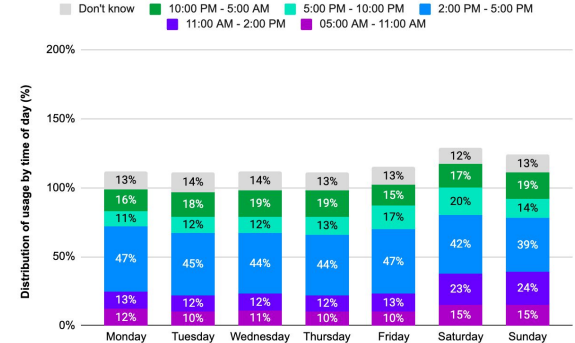


Figure 3.2.2:
Individuals in Germany, Switzerland (D-CH) Who Use YouTube on at Least One Device

Source: GfK Switzerland & Webrepublic, 2025, YouTube Unfiltered – Usage Study Switzerland



3.3. Device Usage

Multi-Device as the Key to Success



3.3. Device Usage

Mobile and Desktop Form the Basis of Reach

Communication strategies often assume seamless use across multiple devices. The concept of a "cross-device customer journey" suggests that users continuously switch between smartphones, laptops, tablets, and connected TVs.

However, the results of our research paint a more nuanced picture: In practice, YouTube usage is concentrated on one or two main devices, with smartphones and desktops/laptops playing a particularly dominant role.

While connected TV offers a usage experience similar to traditional television viewing, it has a significantly lower daily usage frequency compared to smartphones/desktops/laptops. This is especially interesting given the current near-hype surrounding CTV in the industry, with increasing advertising budgets being invested in this device.

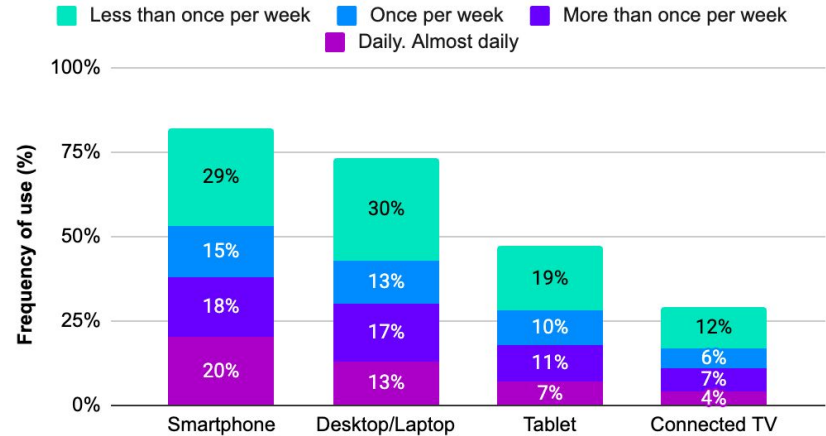


Figure 3.3.1: Frequency of YouTube Usage by Device

Source: GfK Switzerland & Webrepublic, 2025, YouTube Unfiltered – Usage Study Switzerland



3.3. Device Usage

Concentration of regular use on a few devices

The data shows that regular YouTube use is mostly concentrated on one or two preferred devices. The assumption of constant device switching across numerous devices is therefore only partially true.

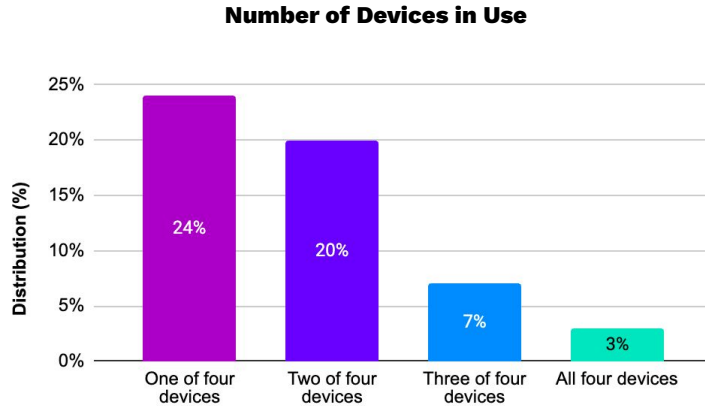


Figure 3.3.2: Distribution of the Number of Devices Used for YouTube

Source: GfK Switzerland & Webrepublic, 2025, YouTube Unfiltered – Usage Study Switzerland

Instead, users develop clear preferences – for example, using a smartphone for everyday use and a desktop or laptop for longer, more focused use. The results show that “device hopping” across numerous devices is a myth. Mobile/desktop/laptop achieves reach, while connected TV provides depth of use.

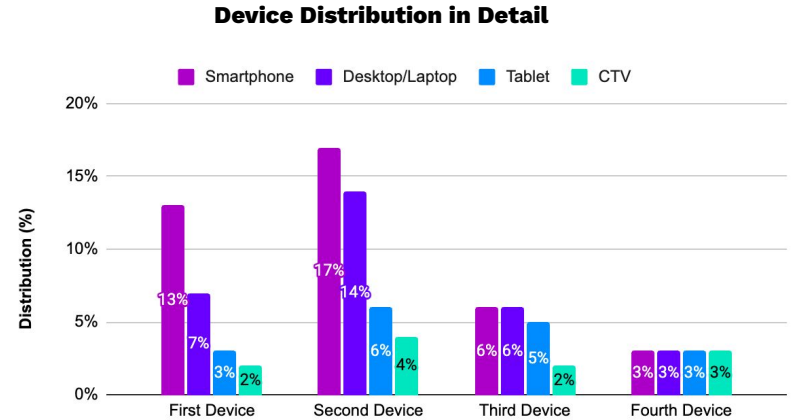


Figure 3.3.3: Device Usage by Ranking in YouTube Usage

Source: GfK Switzerland & Webrepublic, 2025, YouTube Unfiltered – Usage Study Switzerland



3.4. Usage Motives

Focused Engagement as a Lever for Advertising Impact



3.4. Usage Motives

From Passive Lean-Back Medium to Active Tool for Problem Solving and Professional Development

YouTube is often mistakenly perceived as a purely lean-back and entertainment medium. Our study results correct this perception:

- **Active Knowledge Acquisition**

Swiss users actively seek solutions – from complex technical topics and DIY tutorials to professional skills development.

- **The "Intent Mode" in the Hybrid Space**

The mode of reception shifts from passive consumption (e.g., distraction) to active problem solving (e.g., learning skills). This creates very different usage scenarios within the same platform – each with varying levels of attention. Our goal as media planners should always be to reach people not in situations where they merely want to be distracted, but in situations where they are actually paying attention to the content.

- **Shift in Logic:**

Advertising effectiveness is no longer solely a product of frequency and reach, but heavily dependent on the user's motivation.

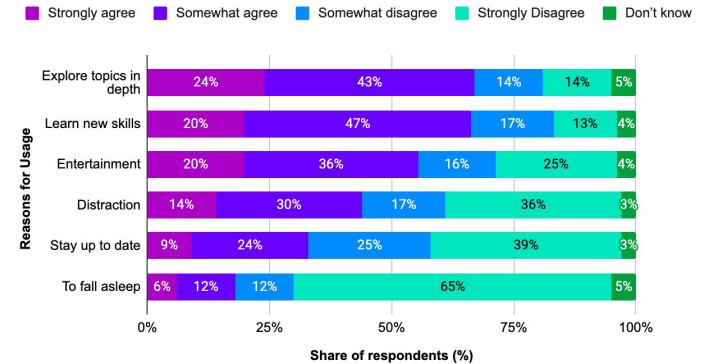


Figure 3.4.1: Why YouTube Is Used – From Learning to Entertainment

Source: GfK Switzerland & Webrepublic, 2025, YouTube Unfiltered – Usage Study Switzerland



3.4. Usage Motives

YouTube Is Not a Mass Medium, but Rather a Collection of Specialized "Content Bubbles"

The Swiss YouTube landscape is not homogeneous. It consists of clearly defined, content-related clusters (contexts) shaped by the individual motivations of its users.

- **Individualization:** Users on YouTube are goal-oriented. Those who want to learn to cook end up in the food bubble; those seeking professional development in the business bubble. These bubbles are clearly defined clusters, but they are individually combined.
- **Interest Trumps Demographics:** These "content bubbles" unite people across age and gender boundaries. The shared goal (e.g., "building financial knowledge") is the connecting element—not age or gender.
- **Contextual Relevance:** The usage situation is already predefined by the cluster's topic. Advertising here doesn't simply encounter random contact, but rather users with a specific mindset.

To be successful on YouTube, you need to understand your target audience's "bubble," not just their demographics. Usage contexts are clearly defined and not a matter of chance.

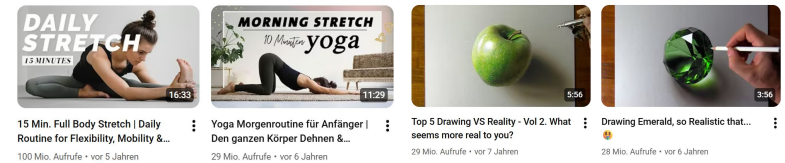


Figure 3.4.2: Examples of the Content Bubbles for Skills

Source: GfK Switzerland & Webrepublic, 2025, YouTube Unfiltered – Usage Study Switzerland

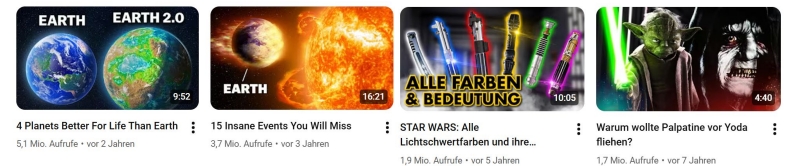


Figure 3.4.3: Examples of the Content Bubbles for Expertise

Source: GfK Switzerland & Webrepublic, 2025, YouTube Unfiltered – Usage Study Switzerland



3.4. Usage Motives

Women in Learning Mode, Men in Entertainment The Gender Gap in Swiss YouTube Logic

Our study breaks with classic stereotypes: In Switzerland, a clear gender-specific divide emerges in the intention behind platform use:

- **Women in "learning" mode:** Women use YouTube more often than average as an educational tool. They specifically search for tutorials, DIY instructions, and content for personal or professional development.
- **Men in "entertainment" mode:** Male usage is more strongly characterized by traditional entertainment.

Those who want to reach women on YouTube in Switzerland often encounter them during a period of high cognitive demand, while men are more likely to use YouTube for entertainment purposes.

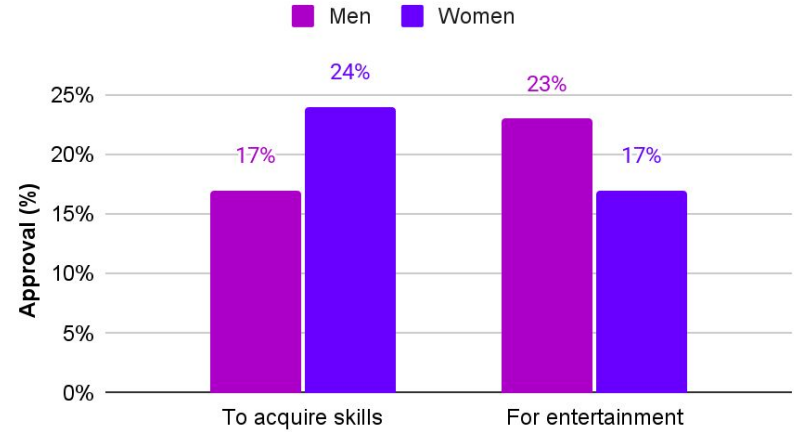


Figure 3.4.4: Usage Motives on YouTube by Gender

Source: GfK Switzerland & Webrepublic, 2025, YouTube Unfiltered – Usage Study Switzerland



3.4. Usage Motives

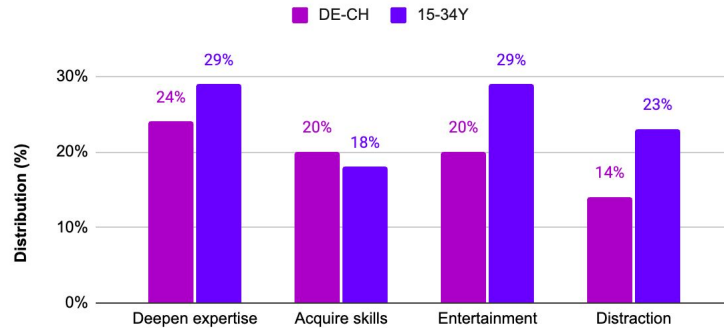


Figure 3.4.5: Reasons for Using YouTube by Age Group

Source: GfK Switzerland & Webrepublic, 2025, YouTube Unfiltered – Usage Study Switzerland

Generation YouTube: YouTube as the "Soundtrack of Everyday Life"

Among the young target group (15–34 years), a wide range of usage motives is evident: In addition to delving deeper into specialist topics and entertainment, the motive of

Distractions are highly prevalent. Compared to other age groups, YouTube is therefore used more frequently as a background medium.

- **Background Medium Instead of Focus:** YouTube is used alongside other activities (sports, gaming, cooking, commuting). The platform is thus not only actively watched but also consumed incidentally.
- **Audio-First Usage:** Through music videos and podcasts, YouTube often becomes a purely audio channel for this target group. The visual aspect becomes secondary.
- **The Paradox:** Because this target group frequently uses YouTube as a background medium, measuring actual reach is particularly problematic for them. YouTube does not differentiate between video views that were actually watched and those that were played in the background while, for example, listening to music. Both situations are counted as views, but the attention and, consequently, the advertising impact are of a completely different value.



4. Strategic Context

How Usage Motives Determine the Quality of Advertising Contacts



4. Strategic Classification

User Motives in the Context of Usage Duration

Usage Duration Determines the Contact Potential – Usage Motives Determine Cognitive Involvement

The goal of media planning is to specifically reach those users whose usage motives on YouTube promise high advertising effectiveness. The potential impact is significantly higher for people who use YouTube for targeted entertainment or education than for purely passive distraction.

At the same time, it becomes clear that usage duration alone is not a reliable indicator of effectiveness. What is crucial is the underlying motive for consuming content. This problem is exacerbated by the younger target group, who use YouTube relatively frequently for distraction as well as for intentional purposes. Here, accurate categorization becomes all the more important to ensure that the target group is not reached during moments of distraction.

Longer, continuous viewing sessions increase the likelihood that content is consumed attentively and with focus, while short or fragmented use is more often associated with fleeting perception. This makes usage duration a crucial link between reach and impact: it influences whether contacts are merely generated or whether they exceed the necessary attention threshold.

At the same time, it must always be considered in conjunction with the motives for use. These ultimately determine whether content is consumed in a more focused or more fleeting state – and thus, how likely it is that advertising messages will be perceived and remembered.

Therefore, it can be argued that usage duration is a key foundation for effective advertising contacts. Particularly among younger target groups, high usage intensity leads to a concentration of potential contacts.



4. Strategic Classification

Usage Motives in the Context of Time of Use

A key question that arose from the analysis of usage time is why the afternoon sees such high usage.

This highlights the need to consider the time of use in conjunction with the usage motive.

The study shows that different usage motives occur simultaneously, particularly in the afternoon. In addition to targeted information searches and in-depth exploration of specialized topics, YouTube is also used more frequently than average for entertainment and distraction during this time.

Thus, the afternoon combines both high-intensity and less focused usage situations. This simultaneous occurrence of different motives makes evaluating advertising contacts particularly challenging. Advertisers encounter both users with a high level of content engagement and those who...

Those who consume content more or less incidentally. For media planners, this means that a differentiated consideration of usage motives becomes necessary, especially during this time frame.

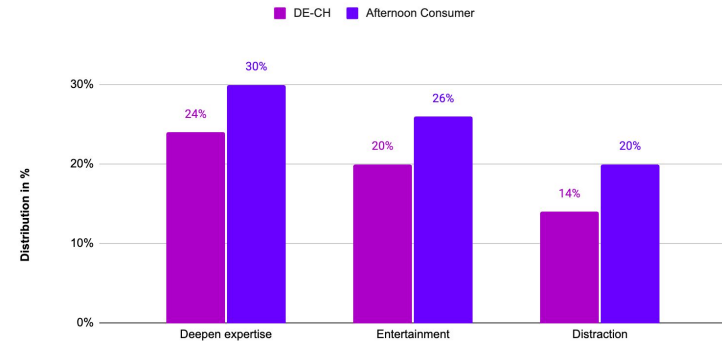


Figure 4.1: Why is Usage so High in the Afternoon?

Source: GfK Switzerland & Webrepublic, 2025, YouTube Unfiltered – Usage Study Switzerland



4. Strategic Classification

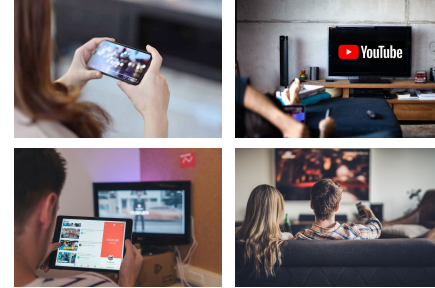
User Motives in the Context of Multi-Device Use

People Are Interested in Content – Not the Devices They Use!

The device analysis revealed that so-called “device hopping” is a myth and that successful YouTube strategies are based on a balanced multi-device approach that strategically combines reach, usage context, and inventory quality.

Ultimately, users aren't concerned with the device, but with the actual content. Therefore, focusing solely on devices for planning falls short and must instead consider user motives.

How Consumption Is...



What Is Being Discussed...



5. Conclusion

Rethinking Media Planning – From Reach to Impact



5. Conclusion

The Deficit of Purely Technical Metrics

The results of this study demonstrate that reach alone does not provide a valid basis for managing advertising effectiveness. In current media practice, technical metrics such as impressions, view-through rates, and unique reach dominate success evaluation. However, these metrics merely document the technical delivery of an advertisement but provide no information about whether the contact actually achieved cognitive anchoring or a substantial brand impact.

The “Attention Gap” as a Structural Problem

Our study and our experience from ad recall measurements reveal a significant discrepancy between technical presence and actual perception—the so-called “attention gap.” In practice, this means that while advertising is counted as a fully-fledged contact by the system, it often does not receive the necessary attention to have an impact. This structural equation of delivery and impact leads to campaigns being efficient but ultimately ineffective.

While YouTube can be scaled, a significant portion of the invested contacts make no measurable contribution to brand building. This is particularly evident among younger target groups, who often use YouTube only as a supplementary medium. Therefore, considering the usage context is essential for media planning.

The True Drivers of Advertising Effectiveness

The perspective of media planning must therefore fundamentally shift: Reach is a necessary prerequisite, but it should not be the goal in itself. Advertising effectiveness only arises from the specific interplay of user motivation, usage context, device, duration, and timing. These factors define the attention span and determine whether a contact is even processed and remembered by the human brain.



5. Conclusion

The Challenge of Platform Complexity

Especially on fragmented platforms like YouTube, identifying effective usage contexts is becoming increasingly complex. The enormous variety of content and the continuously growing inventory make it difficult for advertisers to manage genuine relevance beyond aggregated metrics. However, those who are merely present without considering the context risk significant wasted ad spend in environments with low attention quality.

Strategic Consequence: Targeted Impact Management

The consequence for modern media planning is clear: reach must be understood as a means to an end, which must be strategically generated under conditions relevant to impact. The focus of media planning thus shifts away from simply maximizing contacts towards the qualitative management of impact. Given the complexity of modern ecosystems, this approach can only be efficiently implemented through data-driven and technological solutions that systematically evaluate and utilize real-world usage scenarios.



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