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YouTube autoplay button

KILLING RHYTHMS (with Kaiya Waerea + Houman)

Autoplay Capitalism

Streaming platforms hijack our sense of time by using autoplay, algorithmic recommendations, and binge culture to erase natural breaks. This system does not consider the concept of *crip time* and instead exploits people who experience time differently.

1.1 Identify a ‘killing rhythm’

Autoplay Capitalism as a Killing Rhythm

Autoplay isn’t just a feature—it’s an economic model. It keeps users in an endless loop, replacing natural pauses with seamless transitions. Autoplay capitalism thrives on exhaustion, blurring the line between choice and compulsion.

- **Erasing Natural Breaks:** Autoplay removes friction, making stopping feel unnatural. The ‘Are you still watching?’ prompt isn’t a safeguard—it’s a challenge.
- **Hijacking Dopamine Loops:** Every autoplayed episode or suggested video feeds into the brain’s reward system, creating a cycle of instant gratification and long-term depletion.
- **Capitalizing on Fatigue:** The more tired you get, the less likely you are to make intentional choices. Streaming platforms, social media, and even online shopping rely on decision fatigue to keep users engaged mindlessly.
- **Destroying Rest & Focus:** The algorithm doesn’t care about your sleep, your work, or your mental clarity. It functions best when you’re in a zombie-like consumption state, clicking ‘Next’ without thinking.

1.2 Background

1) Attention as a Commodity

In the digital age, your attention is the product. Platforms don't just entertain – they extract, monetize, and sell your focus to advertisers.

- **From Goods to Clicks:** We once traded in physical goods; now, engagement is currency.
- **Designed for Distraction:** Infinite scroll, autoplay, notifications – engineered to keep you hooked.
- **Your Time ≠ Yours:** Every second spent scrolling is profit for someone else.

More screen time
= more ad impressions
= more money

2) Consumption Culture

Traditional media consumption was structured – TV had scheduled programs, newspapers had editions, and books required intentional reading time. Attention was directed in a linear fashion, with clear start and stop points. However, modern digital platforms function differently. Streaming services, social media, and gaming now operate on demand, making content consumption fluid and boundless. The shift from scheduled to algorithmic engagement removes the natural cues that once dictated when to stop consuming.

With infinite content and no structured breaks, attention is now fragmented. Instead of deep engagement, users experience a state of perpetual distraction – jumping from one video to another, switching between apps, and consuming media across multiple screens. The attention economy profits from this split focus, keeping users engaged but never truly present.

2.1 Reclaiming Natural Pauses

1) Crip time

Crip time acknowledges that people experience time differently, often requiring breaks, pauses, and alternative pacing. Streaming platforms ignore these diverse needs and instead create environments where stepping away feels unnatural, especially for neurodivergent users..

Have you ever fallen in love with a a clock? 2021
by Shannon Finnegan

2) The Nature of Autoplay – **Passive Attention**

Autoplay doesn't just recommend – it absorbs. Swiping, sliding, infinite scrolling – all designed to ensure continuous engagement. Movement is encouraged, but it's directionless, keeping users locked in.

To autoplay is to not think, to let an algorithm's will dictate what you should watch and engage with. It creates a cyclical pattern.

3) The Nature of Pop-ups – **Active Attention**

While autoplay encourages continued viewing, pop-ups interrupt it.
They appear suddenly on the screen, demanding the user's attention rather than capitalizing on it.

2.2 Pop-up Plug-in as an Intervention

We chose pop-ups because they are intrusive, disruptive, and impossible to ignore – perfect for breaking the autoplay cycle. Other interventions (like timers or reminders) can be easily dismissed, but a well-designed pop-up forces a break.

So we plan to design a plug-in. After the user installs the plug-in, the pop-up window will start popping up after autoplay is detected.

1) How does the plug-in work?

- **Direct Disruption:** A plugin that interrupts autoplay with reminders about its effects.
- **Forces Conscious Engagement:** Disables autoplay, making users actively choose to continue.
- **Exposes the Profit Model:** Reminds users that platforms thrive on their endless attention.

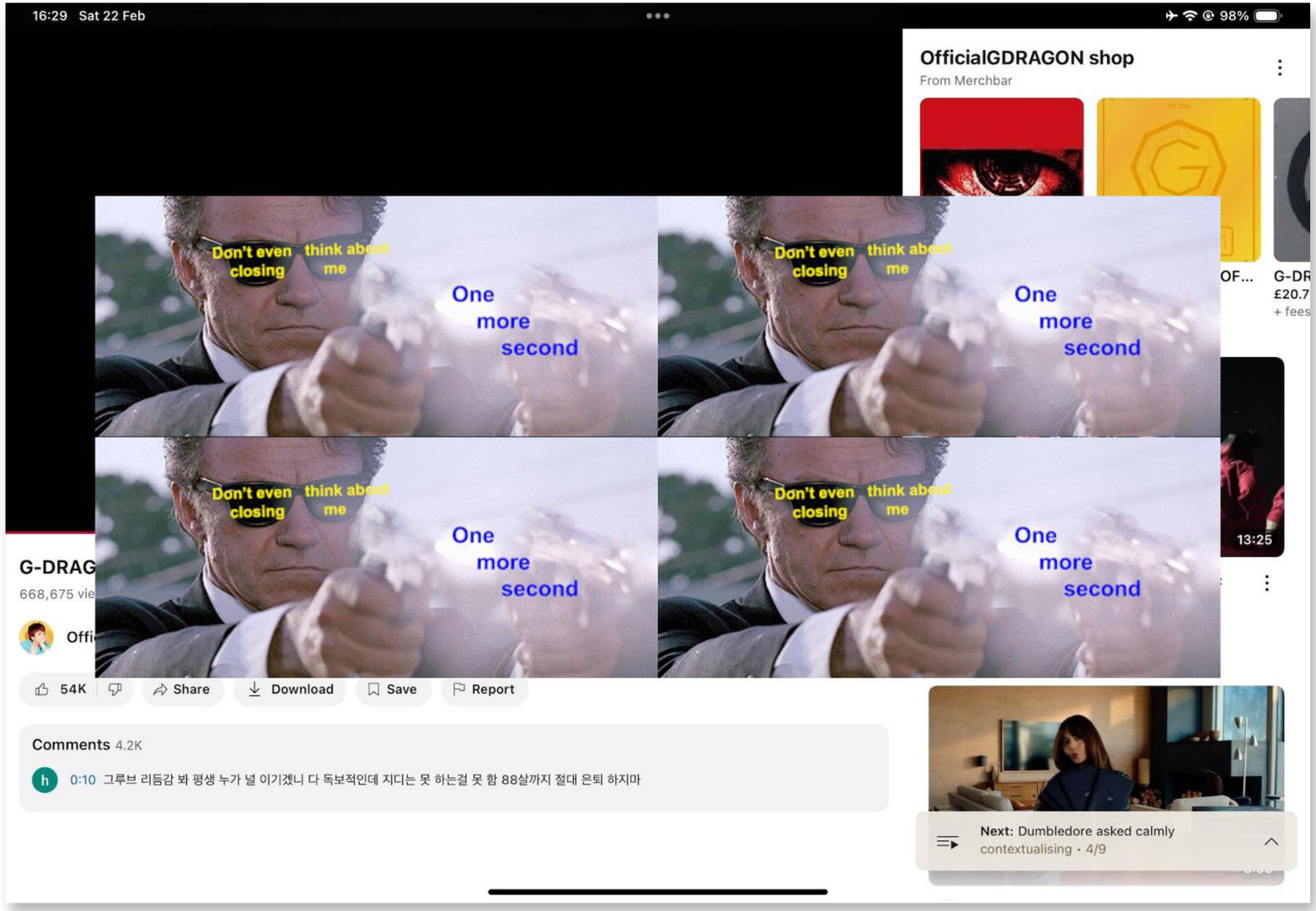
2) The Style of Pop-ups

- **Disrupting the Expected**
- **Breaking the Algorithm's Flow**
- **Mimicking Internet Chaos**
- **No Single 'Look' = No Easy Dismissal**

To Keep users on their toes – because predictability is autoplay's greatest weapon.

- **Targets Neurodivergent Users:** Exploits dopamine loops, special interests, and decision paralysis.
- **Regaining Control:** Helps users break out of compulsive consumption and reclaim their time.

3.1 Simulating Interruptions: Intervention Video



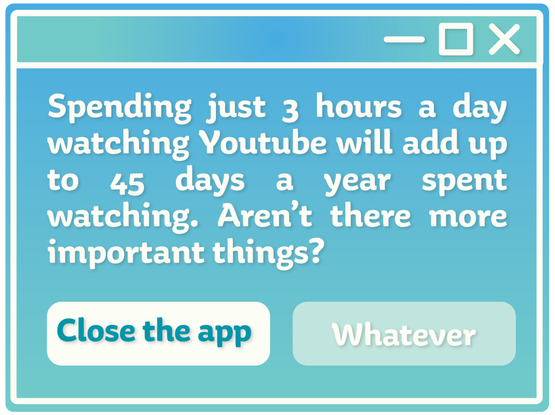
Taking YouTube as an example, we made a video to simulate the application of the pop-up plug-in in autoplay.

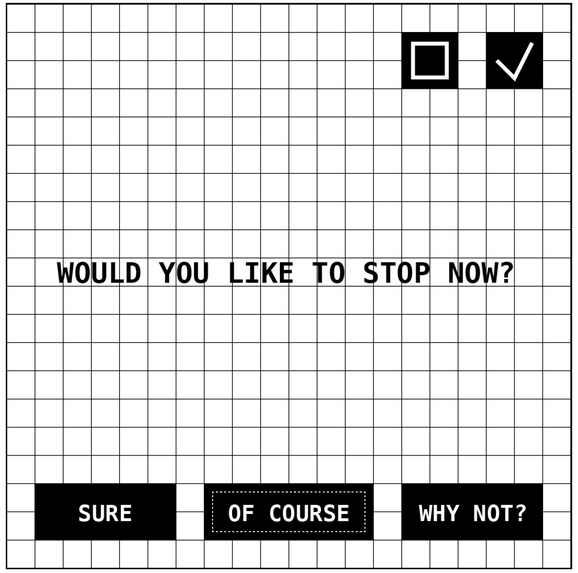
Video Link: https://vimeo.com/1059887089

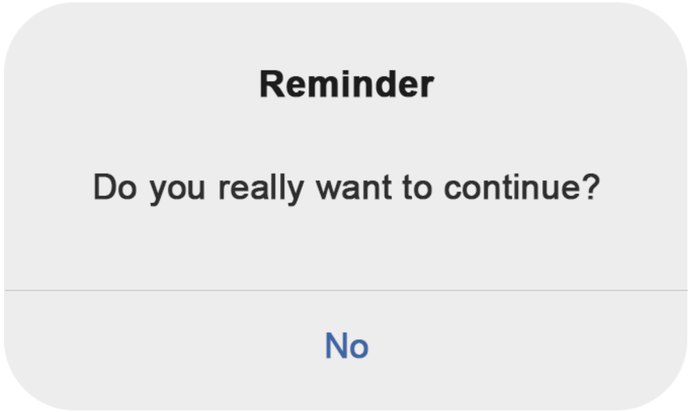
3.2 Pop-up Design

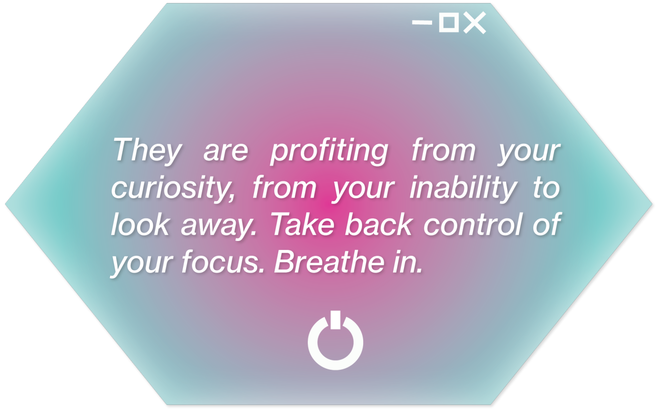
1) Reminders

Many of the pop-ups act as reminders about time and try to remind the person to be mindful about the amount of attention they offer the content.





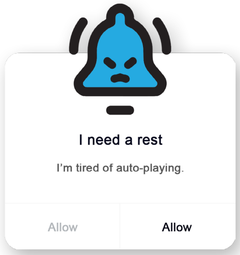


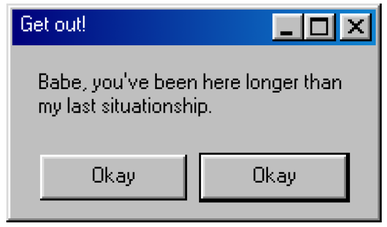


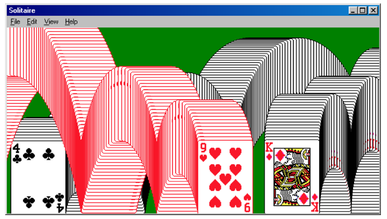
05 Methods of Contextualising

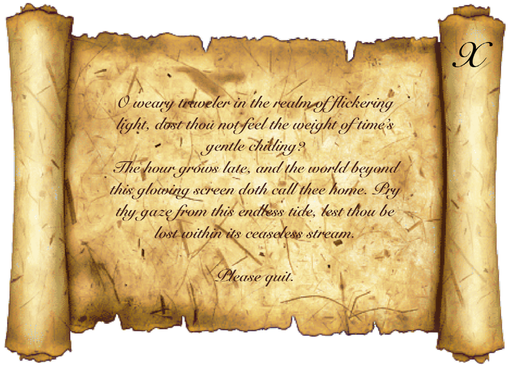
2) Sarcastic

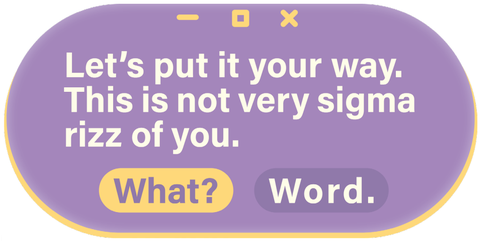
Some of the other pop-ups fell into a different niche all together, aiming to make the user aware of their binging through sarcasm and silly jokes.

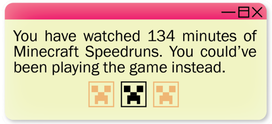


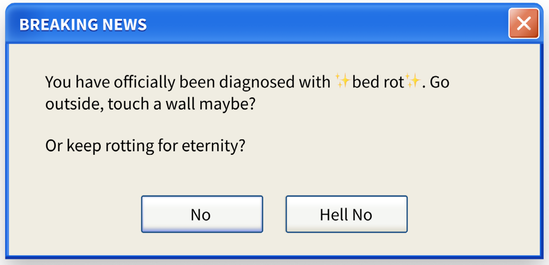


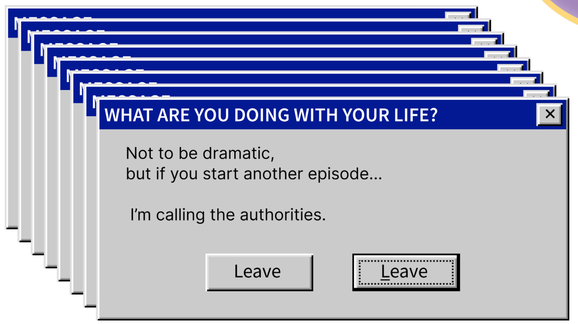


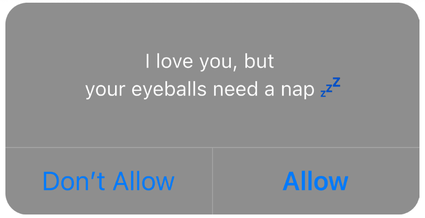






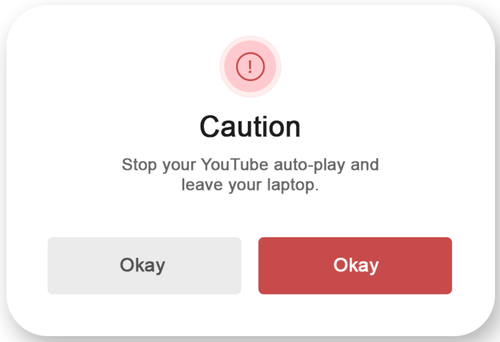


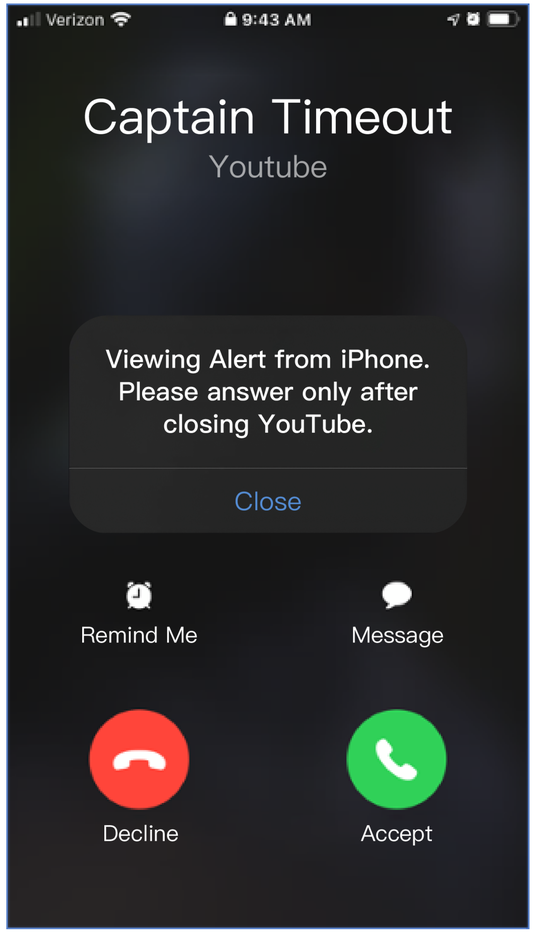


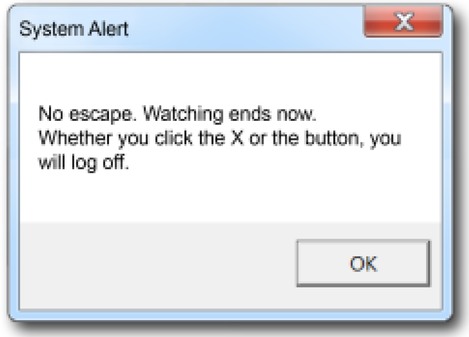


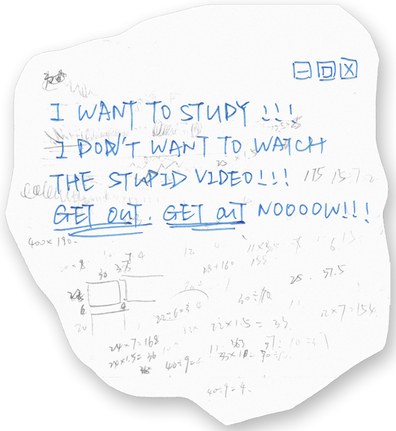
3) Demands

Some of these pop-ups do not accept your non-compliance.







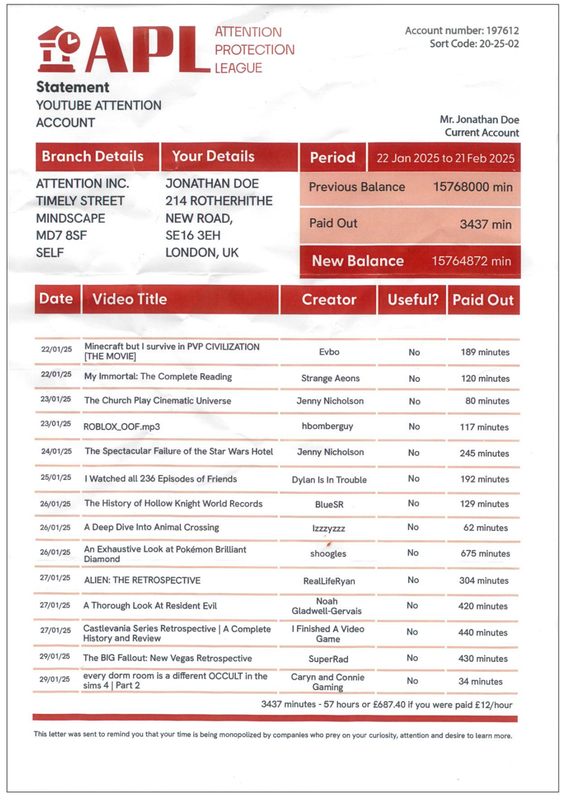


05 Methods of Contextualising

After the second presentation on 25 February, we expanded the design based on the tutors' feedback. Perhaps we can build a more complete ecosystem for interrupting autoplay.

4.1 YouTube Attention Statement letter

In our research, we found that the autoplay of streaming platforms is related to consumption culture and economy. So attention can be quantified with money, which would highlight the economic model of attention in a direct and unsettling way. So we made a YouTube Attention Statement in the form of a bank statement.



APL ATTENTION PROTECTION LEAGUE

Account number: 197612
Sort Code: 20-25-02

Statement
YOUTUBE ATTENTION ACCOUNT

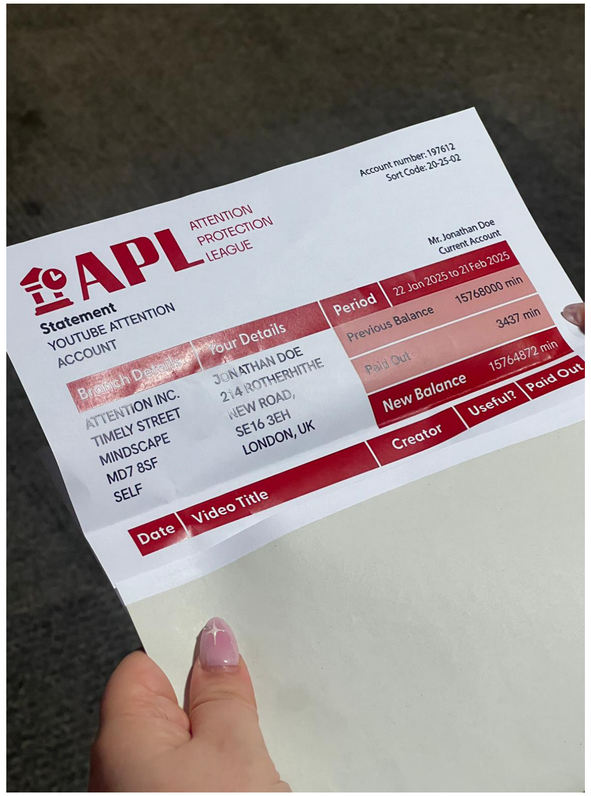
Mr. Jonathan Doe
Current Account

Branch Details	Your Details	Period	22 Jan 2025 to 21 Feb 2025
ATTENTION INC.	JONATHAN DOE	Previous Balance	15768000 min
TIMELY STREET	214 ROTHERHITHE		
MINDSCAPE	NEW ROAD,	Paid Out	3437 min
MD7 8SF	SE16 3EH		
SELF	LONDON, UK	New Balance	15764872 min

Date	Video Title	Creator	Useful?	Paid Out
22/01/25	Minecraft but I survive in PVP CIVILIZATION [THE MOVIE]	Evbo	No	189 minutes
22/01/25	My Immortal: The Complete Reading	Strange Aeons	No	120 minutes
23/01/25	The Church Play Cinematic Universe	Jenny Nicholson	No	80 minutes
23/01/25	ROBLOX_OOF.mp3	hbomberguy	No	117 minutes
24/01/25	The Spectacular Failure of the Star Wars Hotel	Jenny Nicholson	No	245 minutes
25/01/25	I Watched all 236 Episodes of Friends	Dylan Is In Trouble	No	192 minutes
26/01/25	The History of Hollow Knight World Records	BlueSR	No	129 minutes
26/01/25	A Deep Dive Into Animal Crossing	Izzzyzzz	No	62 minutes
26/01/25	An Exhaustive Look at Pokémon Brilliant Diamond	shoogles	No	675 minutes
27/01/25	ALIEN: THE RETROSPECTIVE	RealLifeRyan	No	304 minutes
27/01/25	A Thorough Look At Resident Evil	Noah Gladwell-Gervais	No	420 minutes
27/01/25	Castlevania Series Retrospective | A Complete History and Review	I Finished A Video Game	No	440 minutes
29/01/25	The BIG Fallout: New Vegas Retrospective	SuperRad	No	430 minutes
29/01/25	every dorm room is a different OCCULT in the sims 4 | Part 2	Caryn and Connie Gaming	No	34 minutes

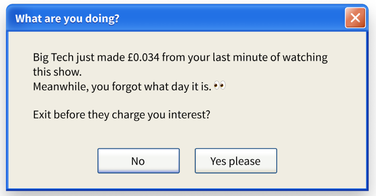
3437 minutes - 57 hours or £687.40 if you were paid £12/hour

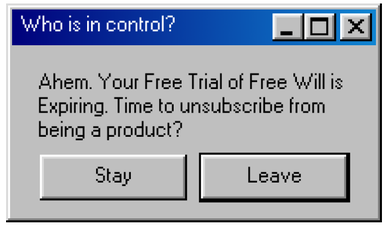
This letter was sent to remind you that your time is being monopolized by companies who prey on your curiosity, attention and desire to learn more.

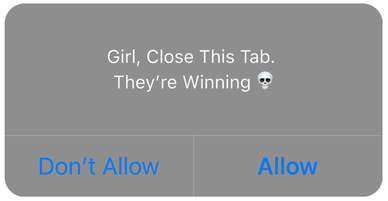


4.2 Economic Model Pop-ups

Additionally, we made some new pop-ups to show the autoplay is related to the economy. The text of the pop-up attempts to remind users that their attention is being sold as a commodity.

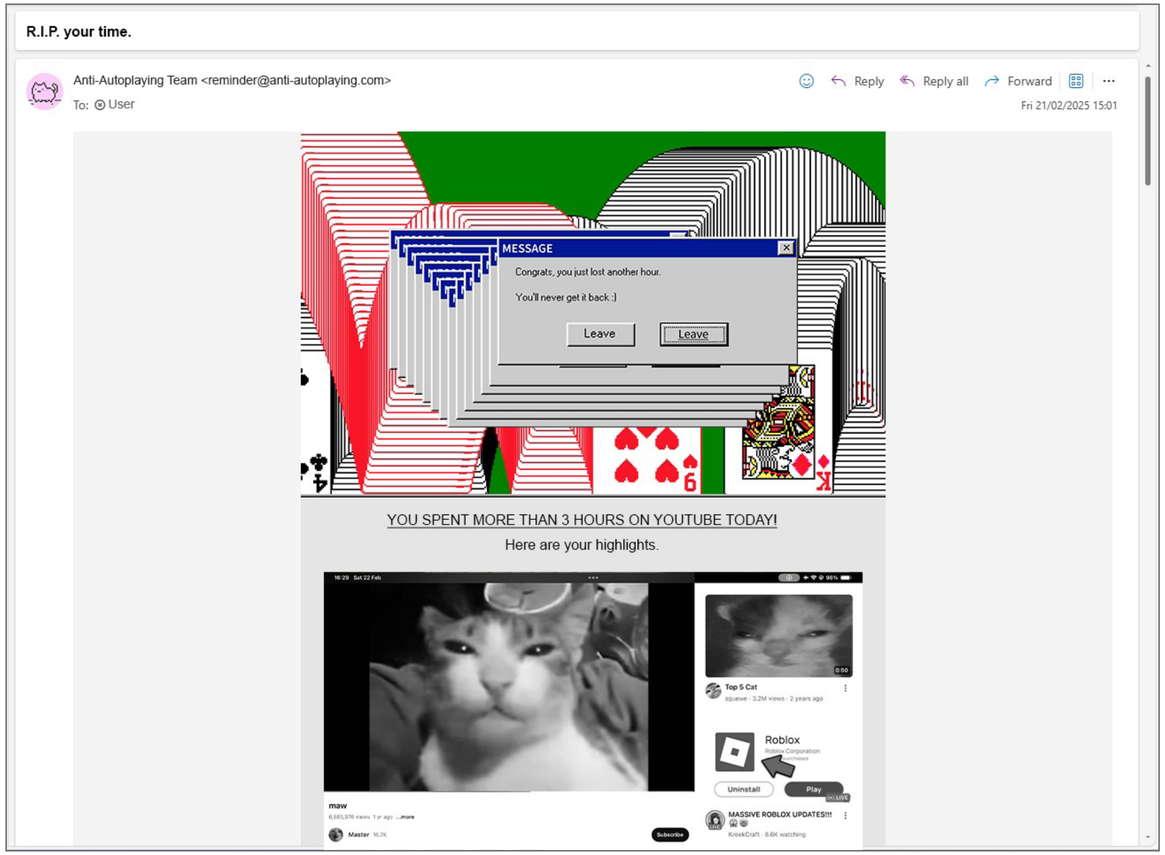






Phone Email

Laptop Email



4.3 Email Reminders

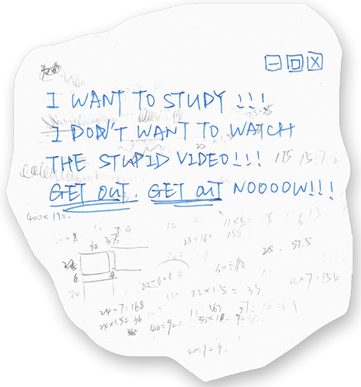
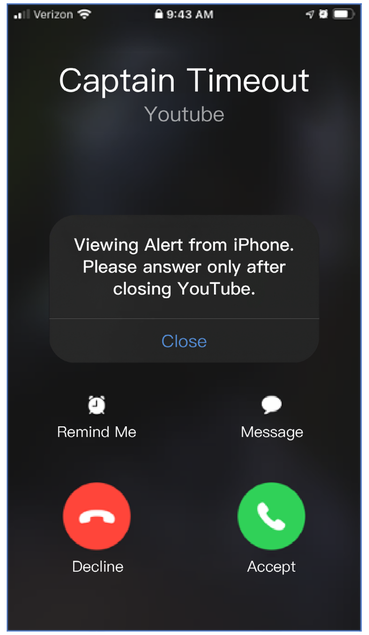
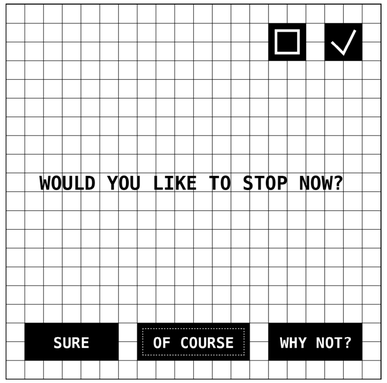
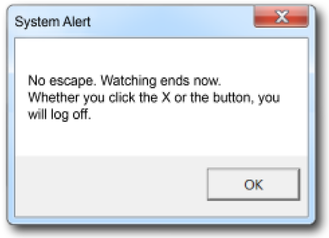
Inspired by the Duolingo ecosystem, we included email reminders to expand the intervention beyond a single approach to reinforce interruptions.

5.1 Reflections

1) The pop-up plugin is designed to make users aware of the platform's influence and allowing them to reclaim their own decision-making. This raises a question: could we offer more open-ended choices?

2) For people who are sensitive and experience time differently, it is crucial that pop-ups are direct and easy to understand and use. Overly complex pop-up designs could increase the barrier to entry for users.

3) To truly help users reclaim their attention, pwe may need to find a balance between functionality and user experience – too frequent or intrusive interventions might become distractions themselves.

5.2 My tasks in the group:

- Editing the video (excluding sound effects)
- Designing 8 pop-ups (*as below*)
- Designing the phone email graphic