

Introduction

Cooking is an activity that requires focus, timing, and precise execution, especially for beginners. Many people today rely on Youtube tutorials as their primary source of guidance while cooking. Whether it's a step-by-step guide to making pasta or a complex dish requiring multiple techniques, users expect a seamless experience where they can pause, resume, and follow along without friction. However, current ad interruptions in the Youtube chrome mobile browser create significant usability challenges, leading to frustration and even potential disengagement from the platform.

Meet Sam, a beginner cook who uses Youtube on chrome mobile browser to follow recipes while preparing meals. Sam often pauses videos to let something cook, chop ingredients, or check on the dish. However, upon returning to the video, something frustrating happens - he unpauses and an ad starts playing or he loads the video again and then also an ad starts playing.

If it's a skippable ad, he must wait a few seconds before continuing.

If it's a non-skippable ad, he has to wait longer, sometimes sitting through multiple ads.

These disruptions increase cognitive load and make cooking unnecessarily stressful because:

- ☐ Sam's hands may be dirty, making it hard to touch the screen again and again to skip. He wants a single tap to unpause and continue cooking.
- ☐ Manually skipping ads while cooking is a hectic process for a person new to cooking and can cause frustration or mistakes.
- ☐ His phone might slip due to hurried gestures and in a kitchen, this can be a dangerous event.
- ☐ A distracting ad could result in food burning or improper cooking steps.
- ☐ Worse, an off-putting or irrelevant ad might ruin his appetite.
- ☐ If this happens frequently, Sam might stop using Youtube for cooking altogether.

And not just Sam, there could be other people who use Youtube for watching tutorials who might face similar issues. Here are some examples:

- ❖ Workout videos: Having to go through an ad mid exercise breaks momentum and causes irritation and ruins the person's mood.
- ❖ DIY/Art/Home or car repair videos: Hands are often covered in glue, paint, or tools making it hard to interact with the screen.
- ❖ Online music classes: Pausing a music lesson and returning to an ad disrupts the creative flow. Music requires utmost concentration.
- ❖ Education videos: Students watching lectures or tutorials might pause to take notes but are disrupted when they return. Their focus might get affected, they might start browsing

other stuff and ultimately believe that Youtube is too distracting for studies when in reality, it is a great resource platform for learning.

All of these examples make a strong case for having a feature on Youtube chrome mobile browser to manage ad activity. In the next section, we shall explore some possible solutions for this problem of “ads disrupting flow of watching/doing/learning something”

Assumptions

Before we start thinking about potential solutions, let us list some key assumptions we will keep in mind while solutioning:

Technical assumptions:

1. This feature will be designed only for Youtube in mobile browser, meaning it will not impact Youtube’s mobile apps or desktop site.
2. Youtube’s current ad policies and monetization structure will remain unchanged.
3. Youtube already allows users to pay for Youtube Premium to remove ads, so our solution should not cannibalize Premium’s value proposition.
4. Since Youtube videos reload after inactivity, we assume there is no way to prevent a full reload within the browser itself - our solution will handle the ad interruption, not the reload issue.
5. For the sake of simplicity, we shall treat skippable and non-skippable ads in the same manner. Our ad free feature will work with both models.
6. Any new UI elements must be minimal and easy to integrate since we can only modify the video page and settings page.

User behavior assumptions:

1. Pausing a video for a long time is common across multiple user scenarios, not just cooking. However, we assume the primary pain point occurs during hands-on activities like cooking, workouts, art, DIY tasks, and music practice etc.
2. Users don’t want to completely disable ads forever - they just need an ad-free experience for specific short-term sessions where interruptions are frustrating.
3. Users who pause videos multiple times in one session should not have to repeatedly activate the feature. A session-based activation approach (e.g., “Ad-free for 30 minutes” like Spotify) might be preferable over a per-instance approach.
4. The feature should be reversible, meaning users should be able to exit or disable the ad-free mode if needed.

Solutioning

- Pay to disable ads for some time

Pros:

- Guaranteed ad free experience - users get uninterrupted video playback
- Revenue generation for Youtube - provides additional monetization without disrupting existing ad-based revenue
- Simple and scalable - easy to implement using Google Play payments/UPI
- Attracts non-premium Users - gives non-subscribers a flexible alternative to Youtube Premium.

Cons:

- Friction in user experience - interrupts the user experience by requiring an on-the-spot payment while watching ads
- Low adoption rate - Most users won't want to pay for occasional ad-free sessions since Youtube has tons of free content, limiting its impact
- Complex pricing strategy - requires careful tuning to ensure affordability without cannibalizing Premium subscriptions

- Fill out a survey to skip ads

Pros:

- No direct cost for users - users contribute time/insights instead of money
- Valuable data collection for advertisers - advertisers get survey insights
- Simple to implement - surveys are already part of Google's ad infrastructure and can be easily leveraged
- More tolerable than watching more ads later - users might prefer sharing opinions as compared to watching multiple ads in a later session

Cons:

- Could feel intrusive - users may find surveys annoying since some thinking is needed to answer, causing distraction from main task like cooking
- Survey fatigue - if overused, people may randomly click through surveys just to skip ads
- Not always relevant - users may get irrelevant surveys, reducing value
- Privacy concerns - users may hesitate to share personal opinions on surveys

- Watch more ads later

Pros:

- No immediate payment needed - users avoid disruptions without spending money

- Maintains ad revenue - advertisers still get their ad views, just delayed by some time
- Gives users more control - users can choose when to see ads, improving satisfaction. For e.g., they defer when cooking but are okay to more ads during a podcast later
- Encourages longer watch sessions - if ads accumulate for later, users may stay engaged longer to clear their ad debt. It will be like a gamification strategy - complete this task to get that reward

Cons:

- Users might feel tricked - seeing extra ads later could feel like a punishment, leading to frustration
- Negative engagement impact - if users know they will get a bulk of ads later, they might avoid watching more videos
- Implementation complexity - needs a detailed tracking system to record how many ads were skipped and then a plan to show those ads later
- Not a truly ad free experience - only delays the problem instead of solving it

● My suggestion - Youtube Engagement Rewards Program

The Youtube engagement rewards program will be a system designed to reward loyal users with ad-free viewing credits based on their engagement with the platform. For every set amount of watch time (e.g., 10 hours), users earn a certain number of ad-free minutes. These credits accumulate automatically and can be redeemed during future viewing sessions, allowing users to enjoy uninterrupted content during activities like cooking or workouts. For now, it will offer ad-free viewing but can be expanded later to give more benefits to users. To clarify, the program is called Engagement Rewards Program and the feature is called Pause Ads.

Pros:

- Enhances user experience
 - By rewarding users with ad-free time, the program reduces ad fatigue and increases satisfaction, encouraging longer and more frequent visits to the platform
- Encourages platform loyalty
 - Users are motivated to engage more with Youtube to earn ad-free credits, fostering a sense of loyalty and habitual use
- Balances monetization and user satisfaction:
 - While ads remain a primary revenue source, offering ad-free credits as rewards maintains monetization strategies without additional costs to the user
- Positive brand perception
 - Of late, Youtube's reputation has been suffering due to a very high prevalence of ads when watching videos. Rewarding users for their

engagement portrays Youtube as a user-centric platform, potentially attracting more users and retaining existing ones

Cons:

- Potential for system abuse
 - Users might attempt to game the system by artificially inflating watch time to earn more ad-free credits
- Implementation complexity
 - Developing a robust tracking and rewards system requires significant resources and could introduce technical challenges.
- Impact on ad revenue
 - If a large number of users accumulate and redeem ad-free credits simultaneously, there could be a temporary dip in ad impressions, affecting revenue
- User Inequality
 - Casual users may feel disadvantaged compared to heavy users who can accumulate credits faster, potentially leading to dissatisfaction among less active users

Proposed solution

I propose that Youtube should build the “engagement rewards program”.

First, we will analyze why this option is better than the other 3 options by comparing them 1 by 1 with rewards program. And then we will make a case for rewards as the right solution for the given problem.

Rewards versus Pay to disable ads

Problems with **Pay to disable ads**

- High friction - users don't want to be interrupted with a paywall when they just want to continue watching
- Low adoption - and even if this payment can be made beforehand from Settings page, most users will not be willing to pay for ad-free sessions when there are free alternatives

Why **rewards** is better than **Pay to disable ads**

- Frictionless - users don't need to make an on-the-spot decision to pay. They automatically accumulate ad-free time by watching content.
- Encourages more engagement - instead of pushing users away with paywalls, this system rewards them for staying longer on Youtube.
- Better brand perception - giving back to users improves Youtube's image as a user-friendly platform, unlike charging for temporary ad removal.

Rewards versus Fill out a survey to skip ads

Problems with **Fill out a survey to skip ads**

- Interruptive & annoying - filling out a survey still disrupts the experience, which is the exact problem we are trying to solve.
- Low participation rates - and even if we create a Survey feature where users can fill surveys whenever they have time, many users will not want to engage with surveys, limiting its effectiveness. They could be perceived as intrusive or too demanding.

Why **rewards** is better than **Fill out a survey to skip ads**

- Completely passive for the user - unlike surveys, rewards don't require extra effort. Users automatically accumulate ad-free minutes by watching as they normally do.
- Higher participation rate - since users don't have to do anything extra, adoption will be significantly higher than with surveys.
- Less annoying, more enjoyable - instead of forcing users to engage with surveys, this system makes the experience feel like a bonus and everybody like a freebie!

Rewards versus Watch more ads later

Problems with **Watch more ads later**

- Feels like a trap - users might be happy skipping ads now, but getting spammed with ads later will feel like a punishment rather than a reward.
- Engagement drop - knowing they will have to endure extra ads later, users might avoid watching more content, reducing overall platform engagement.

Why **rewards** is better than **Watch more ads later**

- No hidden penalties - users get ad-free time without having to pay it back later. It feels like a bonus, not a burden.
- Encourages continuous usage - instead of avoiding content to escape ad debt, users happily engage more to earn ad-free minutes.
- Simpler & more transparent - users instantly understand that more watch time = more ad-free minutes. No confusing debt or penalties. Today, Youtube is used by even elders from remote countries. Keeping it as simple as rewarding as possible will encourage greater loyalty.

Conclusion: Rewards is the ultimate solution. It is the most seamless, fair, and user-friendly approach compared to other solutions. This model respects user engagement, encourages platform loyalty, and enhances satisfaction, making it the best possible solution.

Additional points in favour of Rewards:

In today's digital landscape, users are increasingly inundated with advertisements across various platforms, leading to frustration and a desire for more control over their media consumption. Implementing a Youtube engagement rewards program - where users earn ad-free viewing time based on their activity - presents a compelling solution that balances user satisfaction with platform monetization. This approach not only enhances the user experience but also fosters loyalty and sustained engagement.

Case Studies Supporting Engagement-Based Rewards:

CRED's gamified rewards system:

Overview: CRED, an Indian fintech company, incentivizes users to pay their credit card bills through a gamified rewards program. Users earn points for timely payments, which can be redeemed for various offers and discounts.

How CRED made it work:

High retention rates: CRED boasts an impressive **85% retention rate**, attributed to its engaging rewards system. (<https://www.productmonk.io/p/cred-unique-value-proposition>)

User Acquisition: The referral program led to a **50% increase in new users**, demonstrating the effectiveness of rewards in driving growth.

(<https://www.invitereferrals.com/blog/cred-referral-program-case-study/#:~:text=The%20app%20produces%20shortened%20and,the%20required%20in%2Dapp%20actions.>)

Takeaway: By rewarding users for positive financial behaviors, CRED has cultivated a loyal and active user base, highlighting the potential of engagement-based incentives.

Spotify's monetization challenges:

Overview: Spotify, a leading music streaming service, offers both free (ad-supported) and premium (ad-free) tiers. However, its monetization strategies have faced criticism.

Why Spotify users are unhappy:

Ad Intrusion: Premium users have reported unexpected ads, leading to frustration and perceptions of broken trust.

(<https://www.thesun.co.uk/tech/33342585/spotify-users-fuming-premium-paid-ads/#:~:text=While%20Spotify%20doesn't%20place,read%20endorsements%20and%20sponsorship%20messages.>)

Content Concerns: Critics argue that Spotify's focus on algorithm-driven playlists and background music has diluted the music discovery experience, potentially alienating dedicated listeners.

(<https://www.theatlantic.com/culture/archive/2025/02/mood-machine-liz-pelly-spotify-review/681636/#:~:text=A%20new%20book%20explores%20the,shaping%20what%20its%20users%20hear.&text=Your%20preferred%20video%2Dstreaming%20service.t%20always%20stay%20in%20view.>)

Takeaway: Spotify's experience underscores the importance of aligning monetization efforts with user expectations to maintain satisfaction and loyalty.

To conclude, implementing a Youtube engagement rewards program aligns with successful strategies observed in platforms like CRED, which have effectively used gamified rewards to boost user engagement and loyalty. By rewarding users with ad-free viewing time based on their activity, Youtube can enhance user satisfaction, foster loyalty, and maintain a balanced monetization strategy. This approach addresses the growing user fatigue associated with pervasive advertising and offers a sustainable path forward in the evolving digital content landscape.

PRD for YouTube Engagement Rewards Program

Written by Nargis Jahan, Product Manager, Youtube Ads

1. Introduction

Overview

The Youtube Engagement Rewards Program is designed to reward loyal users by granting them **ad-free viewing credits** based on their engagement with the platform. By watching content, users accumulate credits that can be redeemed for ad-free viewing sessions, enhancing user satisfaction while maintaining Youtube's monetization strategy.

Objectives

Main objective - Improve user experience by reducing ad fatigue especially when too many ads pop up when user is trying to learn something using a Youtube video

Allied objectives -

- Encourage longer watch sessions and increase engagement.
- Provide an alternative to Youtube Premium for users who cannot or do not wish to pay.
- Maintain a balance between monetization and user satisfaction.

Assumptions & Constraints

- This feature applies **only to Youtube on chrome mobile browser** (not the app or desktop site).
- Ads remain a **primary revenue source**, so the rewards system must not significantly impact total ad impressions.
- The system must prevent **abuse** (e.g., bots or passive play without engagement).

- Users should have **clear visibility** into their earned rewards and redemption options.
- The rewards system should be **easy to understand** and require minimal manual effort.

2. User Stories & Use Cases

User Stories

- As a **frequent Youtube viewer**, I want to **earn ad-free viewing time based on my watch history**, so that I can **enjoy an uninterrupted experience when needed** (e.g., while cooking or working out).
- As a **casual Youtube user**, I want to **accumulate ad-free minutes over time**, so that I can **use them for specific videos without having to pay for Youtube Premium**.
- As a **highly engaged user**, I want to **see my earned ad-free minutes in a clear and accessible way**, so that I can **track and plan my viewing sessions accordingly**.
- As a **user who dislikes ads**, I want an **alternative way to reduce ad interruptions** without paying, so that I feel **rewarded for my engagement**.

Use Cases

1. **Earning rewards:** users accumulate **ad-free minutes** based on their **watch time** (e.g., 10 minutes of watch time = 1 ad-free minute).
2. **Redeeming ad-free minutes:** users can **use their earned credits** to watch videos **without ads** for a limited time.
3. **Viewing earned rewards:** users can see **how many ad-free minutes they have collected** in their account.
4. **Expiration mechanism:** unused ad-free minutes **expire after a set period** (e.g., 7 days) to encourage regular usage.
5. **Weekly redemption limit:** users can only **redeem a maximum number of ad-free minutes per week** to prevent abuse.

3. Feature Scope & Details

Feature activation

- The rewards system will be **enabled by default** for all users.
- Users do not need to sign up separately.
- A banner or notification will introduce the feature upon launch.

Earning ad-free minutes

- **Watch time-based accumulation:** Users earn **1 ad-free minute for every 10 minutes** of watch time.
- **Eligible content:** Only videos **longer than 5 minutes** count toward rewards (to prevent abuse with short clips).

- **Engagement requirement:** Users must **actively watch** (i.e., not mute/minimize the video for too long).
- **Limitations:** maximum of **60 ad-free minutes per week** can be earned.

Redeeming ad-free minutes

- Users can choose to **activate ad-free mode** when starting a video.
- If they forgot to activate in the beginning and are inundated with ads in the middle of cooking, there should be a fast and easy way for them to activate the ad-free mode.
- They can apply **only up to 30 ad-free minutes per session**. For the sake of simplicity, a session can be defined as “A session starts when a user begins watching a video and ends when they finish or exit the video.”
- If they pause and return later to the same video, the ad-free session **remains active** until minutes are exhausted.
- Ads will resume **once ad-free minutes are fully used**. A message will convey the end of ad-free session so user is not take by surprise when ads start playing again.

4. Feature Design

Feature adoption via banner+pop up on Home

Once the Rewards feature is released, users need to be told about it. Since we are designing only for a mobile site experience, we will have limited flexibility with using push notifications to announce the release. So we will rely on the user's next visit to the site to let them know about the feature. Post launch, when a user loads Youtube in their mobile chrome browser and reaches Home, they will see a banner declaring the new release. Clicking on the banner will show a pop up describing the feature and giving a link to check their ad-free minutes balance. The balance can be checked at Pause Ads under Settings -> General.

Here is a proposed flow for the same: [Feature Adoption Flow](#)

Feature placement on video page

This feature will be automatically enabled for all users post launch and there will be no need to enable/disable it. So when any user navigates to any video page after launch, and they are **not in full-screen mode**, they will see a new button that says “Pause Ads” which will be off by default. This button will be present right below Channel name and right after “Share” button to improve visibility. Clicking on it will switch it on and clicking again will switch it off.

When user clicks on this button to switch it on, the following things will happen:

- The button's UI will change and it will become ON
- A message will appear near the button saying “X minutes available” and go away in 5 seconds.

- The aim of this message is to let users know how much bandwidth they have left so they can utilise their ad-free minutes better
- If the video was at 0:00, ad-free time will start when user starts the video
- If the video was playing and there was no ad on the screen, ad-free time will start and user will enjoy their desired ad-free experience for as long as their limit is not exhausted
- If the video was playing and an ad was running when Pause Ads is clicked, it will instantly terminate the ad and resume video playback for X minutes.
- When ad-time free time expires, Pause Ads will become OFF again with the message “Balance zero” that goes away in 5 seconds

When user clicks on this button to switch it off, the following things will happen:

- The button’s UI will change and it will become OFF
- By default, for each video a user views, this button will be off initially
- It can be only be turned off after it has been turned on
- If the video was playing and there was no ad on the screen, ad-free time will stop and according to the ad algorithm, user will see ads again

Here is a proposed flow for the same: [Normal mode](#)

The same functionality will be played out using another “Pause Ads” button that will be provided in full screen mode view. It will be present as the last button at the bottom to promote visibility, right after Save. The UI and copy will differ a little from normal mode. Refer flow here:

[Full-screen mode](#)

Feature placement in Settings

There will be a dedicated page in You -> Settings -> General -> Pause Ads (after Video previews and before Language)

When a user clicks on Pause Ads, they will be taken to a new screen which has all the needed information about the feature.

- At the top, the feature name will be written along with a small feature description “Use Pause Ads to enjoy an uninterrupted video watching experience”
- Next to the description, there will be an on/off toggle to switch the feature on or switch it off. The effects will take place when the user engages in any video watching activity after making the changes.
- Next will be the feature tracker for the user showing
 - Horizontal progress bar
 - Minutes earned
 - Minutes used
 - Minutes remaining
 - A small message saying “Note: Minutes reset every Sunday at 0:00 IST”
 - The day will be same for all countries - Sunday

- The time zone will be displayed as per user's time zone
- There will be a "Learn More" at the bottom left which will open a detailed guide regarding the feature including a video tutorial/explanation, plus other details like max minutes that can be earned per week, max minutes that can be utilised in a single session, how many watch minutes equal 1 ad-free minute etc
- If needed, a feedback button can be made available to collect user feedback about this feature. It can be placed at the top right
- To encourage feature promotion, a social sharing button can also be present which users can use to tell friends and family about this feature. When they click on it, a customised shareable image opens for sharing.

Here is a proposed flow for the same: [Feature placement in Settings](#)

5. Edge Cases

The following edge cases should be handled by the system:

- User tries to farm minutes by running videos in the background - minutes count only when the video is actively playing.
- User switches mobile devices mid-session - minutes sync to the user's account, and ad-free time pauses/resumes accordingly.
- User pauses the video, leaves, and returns later - If within 30 minutes (TBD), ad-free time continues, otherwise, ads resume and he must switch it on again.
- User switches to another video while ad-free mode is active - ad-free mode becomes off and the user must switch it on again.
- User has dark mode enabled - pop-ups and UI auto-adjust for readability.
- User dismisses the feature intro pop-up - it won't reappear, but info is accessible in Settings -> General -> Pause Ads.
- User has 1-minute left and turns on ad-free mode - a warning appears, and ads resume immediately after 1 minute.
- User tries to turn on "Pause Ads" with no earned minutes - the feature stays off and a message prompts them to watch more to earn minutes.

6. Success Metrics

To measure the effectiveness of the Youtube Engagement Rewards Program, the following KPIs will be tracked:

1. **User adoption rate** - % of users engaging with the rewards feature
2. **Increase in watch time** - growth in total watch time per user
3. **Ad-free minutes utilization rate** - average % of earned ad-free minutes that are actually used by users
4. **Retention rate impact** - % of users returning after earning rewards

5. **Monetization impact** - measuring whether total ad revenue remains stable or increases or decreases

6. Next Steps

An MVP (Minimum Viable Product) will be developed and rolled out for initial testing. To ensure the feature meets user needs and business objectives, A/B testing will be conducted to measure impact and engagement. Based on testing outcomes, iterative improvements will be made to refine the experience before a full-scale rollout.