

## Mood mismatch between TV shows and ads may hurt advertisers: study

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We've all been there: watching a TV show that reaches a quiet, dramatic moment, only to be jarred by a commercial with loud announcers, upbeat music or gaudy animation. The effect is annoying for viewers – but this mismatch may also be hurting advertisers.

That's the finding of a new study in the *Journal of Marketing*. In a series of experiments, the researchers found that people are more likely to skip "highly energetic" ads when they are in a "deactivated" mood – for example, when they are watching serious, dramatic programs such as *The Americans*, *Homeland* or *The Good Wife*.

Not only that, but that type of mood mismatch also made viewers less likely to remember the brand message.

The findings are important since, thanks to the popularity of online streaming video and PVR technology on TV sets, viewers are able to skip commercials more often than they ever did in the past.

"The advertising landscape is more challenging than ever before because consumers are increasingly prone to tune out traditional forms of advertising such as television commercials," the authors wrote in the study.

Many advertisers tend to create upbeat commercials in order to get attention. In their evaluation of commercials on the U.S. online TV and movie service Hulu, the researchers found that roughly four out of five commercials were "relatively energetic."

But the study suggests that advertisers may want to consider also producing low-key commercials to fit the media environment in which they are placed, or at least to be more careful to place energetic commercials alongside shows that won't present such a mismatch – comedies such as *Modern Family* for example.

"There's a reason why I'm watching a type of show. I want to stay in that emotion state," said Dhruv Grewal, a marketing professor at Babson College near Boston and one of the study's authors. "It's really important that advertisers keep in mind the context."

In one experiment, participants watched a sad video . They then watched an ad, and rated how difficult it was to watch, as well as how energetic they found it to be. Commercials with a positive tone did not irritate viewers, but they rated very energetic commercials quite difficult to watch.

Another experiment asked people to watch either a sad video or a neutral video followed by one of two commercials for Geico – either “highly energetic” or “moderately energetic.” Participants could press a button to skip the ad whenever they wanted.

There was not a significant difference in the time people spent watching each commercial after they had watched a neutral clip; but when they were in a lower mood, after watching the sad movie clip, they skipped the high-energy commercial more quickly than the moderate-energy one.

And this was not just because viewers were sad and the ads were positive in tone: the same result happened when the experiment was repeated with moderate- and high-energy ads on a negative subject (anti-drug public service announcements).

Similarly, the sadness of the video clip was not necessarily the defining factor: it was the low-key mood state people were in after watching the sad clip. Another experiment tested this by asking people either to write about a life experience that made them excited, one that made them feel relaxed or a typical day. Participants then watched one of the same two Geico commercials, with similar results to previous experiments.

Furthermore, other experiments in the study showed that people actually had a harder time with brand recall when they were in a “deactivated” mood state and exposed to a highly energetic commercial.

Given how quick people can be to skip ads, the implication is clear.

“With most commercials, the tagline, the brand, is often in the last three to five seconds,” Prof. Grewal said. “If people are not watching, that commercial is not going to be effective.”