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The Effects of Commercial Intermissions on Viewers' Evaluation of Television Program

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Abstract

Objectives: The purpose of this paper is to empirically examine the degree to which commercial discontinuity influences the audience's ability to enjoy a television program. **Methods/Statistical Analysis**: A randomly assigned two groups were shown a thirty-minute drama, one group without commercials and the corresponding group with four, 15-second commercials inserted in the middle of the drama. **Findings**: Contrary to the expectations, the results showed that the commercial interruptions did not influence the viewers' evaluation of the program. Although consumers prefer to avoid interruptions in television viewing, discontinuity can improve the television watching experience. **Implications/ Applications**: Based on the results of the study, theoretical and practical implications of the impact of commercial discontinuity are discussed.

Keywords: Advertising Effects, Commercial Interruptions, Television Program Evaluation, Television Viewing Condition, Advertising Contents

1. Introduction

The development of new technologies has led some television stations to reconsider the method of profit from their television programs. Television programs are traditionally served with commercials to audiences which are the main source of television stations. However, with the development of new technologies, television programs are sold without commercials.

Netflix rental service and HBO permit audiences access to advertising-free television programs on the basis of a monthly or yearly fee, while audiences can watch advertising-free television programs by paying a one-time pay-per-view charge with On-Demand services. Business models of television station are diversified on the basis of ad-supported revenue model and ad-free revenue model[1].

Little attention has been paid to the effects of commercial intermissions on viewers' evaluation of television programs[2]. Will people enjoy television program without commercials or with commercials inserted in the middle of the program? It is a general common sense that people do not like watching television commercials. Television advertisings in the middle of the program are particularly unpleasant whenever commercials interrupt program contents.

However, recent research on this area showed that commercial interruptions can enhance the viewers' experience of television programming, as pleasure and involvement intensity of the audience are inclined to diminish as the television program makes progress[3,4]. Contrary to the strong distorted views, new findings of the effects of commercial intermissions on viewers' evaluation of television program suggest that television viewers sometimes prefer to watch programs with commercials and enjoyment of television viewing intensity diminishes as the program goes on.

The purpose of this research is empirically to examine the degree to which commercial discontinuity influences the audience's ability to enjoy the television viewing experience.

2. Literature Review

Watching television programs are the most important everyday leisure life of people in recent years. Television viewers hurry home from workplace or school to watch

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popular drama or sport events, and use bathroom during commercial times[5]. Recent research on the relationship between viewers' television program enjoyment and commercial intermissions has been the focus in the area of advertising effect research because main sources of television stations around the world are advertising revenues and subscription fee fees. Lately, On-Demand television model, the representative subscription-based model, charges a one-time pay-per-watching fare to audience who would rather pick up a bill to view favorite television programs such as sport games, movies, dramas without disturbing commercials than view them for gratis with commercials.

Most academic and practical researches in television program interest and commercial interruption are dealt with the impact of commercials on perceptions of television programs. Many of these studies showed that television contents encircling advertisings are a main determinant of commercial message success[6]. In[2] found that residual stimulation created from fast-moving or funny television advertisings could influence an audience's general assessment of the television news show in which they come on the scene. This study also suggested that at the affective level television audiences may not be able to distinguish between television news contents and commercials[2].

In[2] studied how feeling and enjoyment occurred from television contents influence audience's assessments of television advertising[6]. Participants' feeling was invented by watching a neutral, positive or negative sentiment-eliciting television contents, and their enjoyment was manipulated statistically. The result of the study showed that subjects' liking of television contents positively affected attitude toward the commercials and attitude toward the product. On the other hand, enjoyment induced by the television contents did not influence attitudes toward the commercials and the product.

In[7] examined how happy and sad television programs affected the performance of surrounding commercials[7]. The results of this study indicated that with regards to a happy television programs, a sad television contents elicited: an unhappier feelings as audiences viewed both commercials and television contents, lower recognized television advertising success, and more affectively negative recognized reactions. This study also found the main effect of the type of advertising. Commercials contained emotional appeals are more effective than information-based commercials.

In an area of print advertisement effects study[8] argued readers' responses to newspaper or magazine advertisements would be influenced by the mood state of reading the print advertisements. Participants in negative feelings evaluated the advertised brand less favorably than those in positive feelings[8]. On the other hand, those in positive feelings more overestimated the advertised brand than those in negative feelings.

Another research trend in advertising effects is how commercial interruptions and clutter affect the viewer's television watching experience such as comprehension and enjoyment. In[1] studied the degree to which television advertising intermissions in the middle of program disturb with audiences' abilities to understand, enjoy, and involved with complicated television drama[1]. In this study subjects in experimental group watched episodes of well-known television drama including commercials while subjects in control group viewed the same drama with advertising free program. The results of this study showed that television advertising in the middle of drama did not interrupt television audiences' capabilities to understand a very complicated television drama. However, in enjoying and involving with the drama, subjects reacted less satisfied cognitive responses. The author suggested further research on the relationship between commercial intermissions and viewer's television watching experience.

Another research demonstrated that although television audience likes to watch programs without commercials in the middle of programs, television advertising discontinuity could practically enhance the television viewing enjoyment and satisfaction[3,9]. Six experimental studies found advertising in the middle of the program actually made television contents more understandable and enjoyable without reference to the advertising message quality, the method of commercial interruption, and the type of programs.

In light of the above literature review, though the inconsistency of the findings, on the basis of the general and dominant theory in advertising effects and television viewers' experience, two experimental hypotheses are advanced.

Hypothesis 1: Viewers would more enjoy a television program without commercials than a television program with commercial interruptions.

Hypothesis 2: Viewers would be more involved a television program without commercials than a television program with commercial interruptions.

3. Methods

This section explains a method of experiment conducted to exam the two research hypotheses.

Selection of television programs and commercials: In this study, the first step was the choice of television programs and commercials. First, main categories of television programs are classified as news, drama, entertainment, and sports. Ideally, for establishing validity and reliability of the study, more than two program categories are included: however, given the limit of time and resources, one important genre of television programs was selected. Based on the result of pretest (n = 30), drama (52%) was selected as television program genre in the study over news (22%), entertainment (19%), and sports (7%). Second, one hundred and twenty commercials were pre-selected to find four 15-second commercials in the study. Four advertising professionals evaluated them on the bases of level of involvement of the advertised products, quality of commercials, and informational-emotional approach and selected three suitable commercials for the study.

Subjects: One hundred twenty four undergraduate students from an introductory advertising course were participated and randomly assigned to one of two conditions in a 'without commercial condition' and a 'with commercial condition'. Fourteen subjects failed to follow the experiment instructions and were excluded from the final analysis. Subjects participated in this experiment was received course credit.

Procedure and measures: Participants were told that the aim of the study was to evaluate viewer's enjoyment of television program. Half of subjects watched a thirty-minute drama without commercials (control treatment), and the other half watched a thirty-minute drama with commercials (experimental treatment). For the control treatment, participants watched a thirty-minute drama without advertisements. For the experimental treatment, participants watched four 15-second commercials were inserted in the middle of the drama.

For ease of scheduling objective, participants watched in groups in ranging from 20 to 30 per 30-minute drama. After viewing the drama, the subjects were administered the questionnaire that included an evaluation of the television program using a seven-point Likert scale. Enjoyment and involvement were measured in a post-viewing questionnaire. A seven-point scale were used "1 = Not at all enjoyed / Not at all involved" to "7 = Very much enjoyed, Very much involved". After completing the questionnaire, subjects were debriefed and thanked for their participation.

4. Results

Contrary to the expectations, the results showed that the commercial interruptions did not influence the viewers' evaluation of the television program. Subjects with commercials and subjects with non-commercials showed no statistically differences in enjoyment and involvement measures. Therefore, hypothesis 1 and hypothesis 2 are rejected.

Subjects' responses on the enjoyment items were revealed no main effects (t = 1.187, p = n.s.). The means of without commercials (N = 56) and with commercials (N = 54) are 5.32 and 5.28, respectively. In addition, subjects' ratings on the involvement items were also showed no main effects (t = 1.055, p = n.s.). The means of without commercials (N = 56) and with commercials (N = 54) are 5.05 and 5.03, respectively. The results of t-test for hypothesis 1 and 2 for television viewing experience according to the experimental design are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. T-tests for enjoyment and involvement for television viewing experience

Dependent Variables		N	Mean	Sd.	t	*p*
Enjoyment	without commercial	56	5.32	0.77	1.187	0.89
	with commercial	54	5.28	0.89		
Involvement	without commercial	56	5.05	0.78	1.055	0.93
	with commercial	54	5.03	0.95		

5. Conclusion

The findings obtained in this study did not support the hypotheses that commercial intermissions can affect an audience's evaluation of the television program. Subjects evaluated their enjoyment and involvement with the program equally regardless of existence of commercials in the middle of program. However, in spite of the result, any

conclusions would be cautious ones. Whether commercial discontinuity enhances the enjoyment or involvement of the television viewing experience depends on factors such as both the nature of the commercial discontinuity and the nature of television program[2,3,7,11].

The un-acceptance of hypotheses indicates that although television viewers want to evade commercial interruptions in television viewing situations, this research prompts commercial interruptions could increase the enjoyment and involvement with television viewing experience. Then, the question comes out how do television advertising in the middle of programs help to enhance viewers' enjoyment and involvement? It is possible that commercial intermissions are inclined to distract adaptation, resulting in a partial returning to the earlier evaluated concentration level of program viewing experiences[3,11-13].

Although the findings of this study do not support hypotheses, the methodology of this study has at least three limitations and needs a further research. First, the participants of this study were only limited to younger generations who are not the main audience of television. Second, the selection processes of television program and commercials were conveniently processed. A further research with scientific method is needed to investigate the effects of commercial interruptions on viewers' television viewing experience. Third, the subjects attending this research were answered the dependent variables after only one program watching and the situation of experiment was not in a real-life television viewing situations. Therefore, it remains for follow-up research to investigate the effects of commercials in the middle of television programs on television audiences' viewing experience.

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