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Contact: Mary-Ann Twist / 608-255-5582 / JCR@bus.wisc.edu

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Don't Touch That Dial! Watching Commercials Leads to Greater Enjoyment of TV Programs

We all complain about commercials, and many people invest in technology to eliminate them. But a surprising new study in the [*Journal of Consumer Research*](#) shows that, contrary to popular belief, commercials improve television viewing in many cases.

“Although consumers have difficulty predicting this, their enjoyment of television shows tends to gradually diminish during the viewing experience. That is, viewers adapt to the show, making every minute slightly less enjoyable than the previous one,” write authors Leif D. Nelson (University of California, San Diego), Tom Meyvis, and Jeff Galak (both New York University).

The researchers conducted six studies where participants watched and evaluated either continuous or disrupted versions of programs. In the first study, participants watched an episode of the sitcom “Taxi.” Although the participants disliked the commercials, those who watched the show with commercials liked it better than those who watched it without. A second study found that people enjoyed a short animated clip more when it was interrupted by a commercial than when it played continuously.

A third study found that participants who watched an interrupted version of a nature documentary not only enjoyed the documentary more, but were also willing to donate more to a nature charity after viewing.

The researchers also found that non-commercial interruptions had the same positive effect as commercials, reinforcing their hypothesis that when disrupted, people do not adapt to the programs and as a result, enjoy them more. And, finally, commercial interruptions made a video clip more enjoyable for younger consumers than older consumers.

“Very fast-paced and complex shows, such as “24,” probably do not benefit from commercial interruptions since viewers are unlikely to adapt to these shows. However, we do find that commercial interruptions, although universally shunned, do make a wide variety of shows more enjoyable, including sitcoms, animations, documentaries, and music videos,” the authors conclude.

Leif D. Nelson, Tom Meyvis, and Jeff Galak. “Enhancing the Television Viewing Experience through Commercial Interruptions.” *Journal of Consumer Research*: August 2009.

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