

MDI ALERT

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TV Ad Exposure: The Program Type Factor

A TV commercial's ability to attract a viewing audience depends, of course, on what's being advertised and how well the commercial is fashioned to gain and hold attention. But other variables are involved, including the time of day, the degree of ad clutter in the break, the demographic profile of the viewer, and how engaging the program content happens to be. Often, these variables interact. For example, older viewers are less inclined to avoid commercials than younger ones, some TV shows are far more engaging than others, and so on.

Since the 1960s, advertisers have explored the program type factor, often relying on commercial recall scores obtained from companies like Burke and Gallup & Robinson to guide them. These did offer some clues. For example, a compilation of 1,600 studies conducted by Burke in the early 1970s noted that commercials in primetime movies performed about 13% better than its overall norms, while sitcoms and varieties scored 13% below the norm. A mid-2010s analysis conducted here at Media Dynamics, Inc., based on similar research from various sources, noted that dramas performed about 16% above the average, sitcoms came in 6% below, and other types (reality, talk and game shows) were on par with the norm. In addition, studies of program content attentiveness as claimed by TV diary keepers, as well as adults whose behavior was secretly observed by teenage and college spies, also reported higher involvement rates for movies and dramas and considerably lower rates for talk shows, sitcoms, most varieties and sci-fi/fantasy dramas.

The most recent ad recall compilation that we have seen, from a 2011-12 study by Nielsen's Brand Effect service, confirmed most of the older findings. In this report, various dramatic genres scored 10-12% above the norm, sitcoms fell about 5-8% below it, and many of the other genres (reality, game shows and talk) performed at about the average level.

But what about the current scene, with streaming in the mix? Are there any updated data to guide us on these new developments? And do recent attentiveness studies tell us the same things that the older ad recall studies have revealed?

Enter TVision, with its ongoing panel of 5,000 homes whose viewing activities are monitored by webcams that tell us if people are present when commercials appear on their TV screens and whether they are watching them. While we have not seen an all-encompassing genre analysis from TVision, some of the data that they have released gives us partial answers. For example, a 2022 report on CTV viewing found that crime dramas drew ad attention levels 40% higher than reality, game or talk shows, while political commentary shows trailed the crime dramas by 15% in commercial attentiveness. Other reports from TVision have shown that TV news generates ad exposure about 10-12% higher than the norm because older viewers are particularly involved

with this genre. And TVision has reported that ad attentiveness for team sports is about at the average level for baseball, football and basketball.

So, in the light of all of the evidence at hand, we feel that we can make reasonably valid estimates about ad attentiveness for many of TV's program genres, bearing in mind that there are always exceptions to the rule. As shown in the accompanying table, dramas afford advertisers a 20% advantage over the norm in commercial attentiveness, while game shows and news, by virtue of their older audiences, come in 10% above average. In contrast, sitcoms, reality, and talk formats score about 10% below par, followed by animated sitcoms and, at the bottom of the rankings, early AM news/chat shows like *Today*.

**RELATIVE INDICES OF AD
ATTENTIVENESS BY
TV PROGRAM GENRE**

Dramas	120
Game Shows	110
News	110
Sports	105
Sitcoms	90
Fantasy/Sci-Fi Dramas	90
Reality	90
Talk	85
Animated Sitcoms	80
Late Night Variety/Chat	80
Early AM News/Talk	65

Source: Media Dynamics, Inc.