

Intense war news reduces ability to remember ads

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A new study shows that the more graphic and intense war news is, the less likely that viewers - regardless of political beliefs - will remember the advertising that follows the news.

However, the researchers did find that lower-intensity programming resulted in a better recall of the advertising by proponents of the war.

The research, featured in a forthcoming issue of the *Journal of Current Issues and Research in Advertising*, was conducted by Keven Malkewitz, assistant professor of marketing at Oregon State University, and Damon Aiken of Eastern Washington University. It is the first study of its kind related to programming intensity in the context of war news.

They surveyed 396 college students in three universities. They were shown five minutes of war programming (specifically war footage in Iraq), followed by two 30-second commercials, and then showed another five minutes of war news and more commercials. All the commercials had been aired during the nightly national news and featured common, name-brand products.

"More intense" war news was defined as showing more explosions, more disturbing images of bodies and amputees and more key words, such as "suicide" and "explosive" than the programming defined as "less intense."

"There has been a great deal of research done in the area of what

advertisers call 'intensity programming,'" Malkewitz said. "So the expectation was that viewers wouldn't recall any of the advertisements if it involved any war coverage, but that hadn't been studied before. The assumptions were only partly correct."

While strong intensity did indeed mean that all viewers were less likely to remember the ads, viewers who self-identified as supporting the war when it came to the coverage defined as "less intense" often did remember the advertising. The intensity did not seem to affect the recall of those who defined themselves as against the war.

"Advertisers tend to shy away from intense programming and believe that all viewers are affected in the same way," Malkewitz said. "Our research shows that it doesn't have the same effect in all situations, because in war news there is a range of anger, contentment, sadness, hostility and even enthusiasm."

Since this is the first study to directly look at intensity and [advertising](#) in the context of war news, Malkewitz said further research is needed to draw out subtle distinctions in other areas of controversial programming, such as abortion, free speech or other polarizing content.

More information:

ir.library.oregonstate.edu/jspui/handle/1957/14606

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