

# High-energy TV commercials: Too much stress for consumers?

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Consumers are tuning out TV commercials, making advertisers run louder, higher-energy ads to force their attention. This may be backfiring critically when consumers are watching sad or relaxing shows, according to a new study in the *Journal of Marketing*.

"This research stands to fundamentally change the ways advertisers approach the use of commercials," write authors Nancy M. Puccinelli (Oxford University), Keith Wilcox (Columbia University), and Dhruv Grewal (Babson College). "Firms will realize substantially greater success if they use moderately energetic commercials rather than the highly energetic ones that continue to dominate."

The study looked at the effect on viewers exposed to a high-energy commercial during a sad, low-energy show. Participants were asked to watch one of two videos: a clip from the movie *The Champ*, which depicts a young boy's anguished crying, or a neutral clip from a documentary on Albert Einstein. Participants were then shown a 30-second Geico commercial that was either highly energetic or moderately energetic. The highly energetic commercial featured a movie announcer, and the moderately energetic commercial a former NFL football player. Participants were allowed to watch the commercial for as long as they liked. The authors found that people watching a sad movie found it significantly more difficult to watch highly energetic commercials, and viewers were in fact less likely to watch the commercial at all, or to recall the advertiser. Consumers watching a sad show did not turn away, however, if a moderately energetic commercial

came on, responding as much as 50% more favorably in this condition.

"Advertisers should avoid running ads with enthusiastic announcers during sad or low-key shows. In a sea of high-energy commercials, it is even possible that moderate-energy ads could stand out. Modern life leaves consumers with lower energy in general, and they may even react negatively to energetic commercials regardless of the show they are watching. Sensitivity to consumer emotion gives advertisers a chance not only to increase sales revenues, but to enhance the customer experience overall."

**More information:** *Journal of Marketing*,  
[journals.ama.org/doi/abs/10.1509/jm.13.0026](https://journals.ama.org/doi/abs/10.1509/jm.13.0026)

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