

# An Empirical Examination of the Ad-Program “Congruence” Effect on Ad-Viewing Behaviors: Evidence from TVision Data

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This study examines how ad-program “congruence”—the alignment between ad content and TV program themes—affects viewers’ attention to TV ads. Using a large dataset from TVision, we find that ads placed within congruent programs receive greater visual attention, particularly in the entertainment and financial industries. Further analysis shows that this positive congruence effect persists across different ad positions within a program, whether in the first, second, or third segment. These findings offer practical insights for advertisers seeking to optimize ad placement and maximize engagement.

## INTRODUCTION

In the dynamic landscape of advertising, understanding the factors that may impact ad engagement is a pivotal concern for marketers and researchers alike. For decades, television (hereafter TV) has served as a conventional advertising media channel. The inaugural paid TV advertisement, featuring Bulova watches, aired in 1941. Since then, TV advertising has evolved to adapt to technological advances, reshaping not only consumer behavior, but also the media landscape as a whole. As an industry with substantial market size, TV advertising is projected to have a spending budget of \$69 billion in North America in 2024 alone (Zenith 2022). In the new digital era, TV advertising

must continually embrace innovation and new industry trends in order to remain as a powerful and attractive medium for mass audiences.

Moreover, the TV advertising industry is facing many challenges in today’s digitally-saturated and multimedia society. The evidence implies that viewers’ engagement on TV ads has deteriorated over the past few decades (Forrester Survey 2010; Shapiro et al. 2021). Nevertheless, it is still important and worthy to explore the underlying factors that affect TV ad engagement. The emergence of connected TV and other advanced technologies, such as artificial intelligence (AI), has provided the opportunity to create new strategies for effective advertising for targeted audiences.

Keywords: TV ads; ad engagement; ad-program congruence; TV advertising  
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## Management Slant

- Overall, viewers pay more attention to ads that have similar content or topics with the TV programs in which they are embedded (a concept referred to as “ad-program congruence” in this study) and less attention to the ads that have different content with the TV programs.
- The positive and significant “ad-program congruence” effect holds in particular for the entertainment and financial ads, but not for government or food ads.
- On average across all ad categories, the positive and significant “ad-program congruence” effect holds regardless of where the ads are inserted in TV programs (first, mid, or final third of a program). Further analysis indicates that this effect is driven by entertainment ads.