INVESTIGATING THE SIMULTANEOUS PRESENTATION OF
ADVERTISING AND TV PROGRAMMING

In the prevalent format of television advertising, where advertising is presented sequentially with programming, viewers have multiple options to avoid exposure to the ads including the ability to zap ads (change channels when ads are playing) and zip through ads (fast forward ads on recorded programs). The advent of personal video recorders (PVRs) such as TiVo and ReplayTV has also given consumers greater choice in skipping ads. In order to reduce ad avoidance another format for television advertising, the simultaneous presentation of programming and advertising through the use of split screens, has been proposed as an alternative to the sequential format of television advertising. This type of advertising reduces the size of the program to fit a smaller part of the screen, during the presentation of the ad. This creates a form of forced exposure to the ads. Although this ensures that the number of people viewing the ad is equal to the number of people viewing the program, the viewing of the programming with the advertising creates a ‘distraction’ paradigm where the program distracts from processing of the advertising message. This study investigates the effect of the distraction of the program on ad processing as well as the efficacy of the simultaneous format of presentation in terms of reducing ad avoidance. The research issues are: 1) the extent to which the simultaneous presentation of the program and advertising decreases cognitive responses to the advertising and diminishes brand evaluations, and 2) whether the simultaneous presentation format reduces ad avoidance intention.

Prior research has indicated that distraction effects may both enhance or limit the effectiveness of a persuasive message depending on the dominant cognitive thought generated by the message. This indicates that the distraction effect of simultaneous viewing of the programming will have differential impacts on relatively strong advertising messages (where support arguments dominate) and relatively weak advertising messages (those that generate both support and counter arguments and no single type of thought dominates). It is hypothesized that simultaneous presentation will lead to a reduction of support arguments and brand evaluations for relatively strong messages but not for relatively weak messages. An experiment was conducted to examine these hypotheses. Furthermore, in this study, the intention to avoid ads (in terms of both ad zapping and ad zipping) in the simultaneous format was directly compared with the intention to avoid ads in the sequential format.

The results from this study validate the belief that compared to the traditional sequential presentation format, the simultaneous format reduces ad avoidance intentions. This implies that this format may be used as a tool to reduce the negative impact of new technology that allows for easier ad zapping/zipping. However, the results of this study also clearly indicate that the simultaneous presentation format creates a distraction to advertising message processing. Results show that for relatively strong messages, this format of advertising primarily suppresses support arguments. This implies that such a format may not be conducive for ads that have extremely strong messages (even if more viewers watch the ad due to less ad avoidance). For relatively weak messages, where both support and counter arguments are equally generated, the distraction effect of simultaneous advertising will have no significantly adverse impact. This implies that the simultaneous format may be beneficial for relatively weak messages.