

A Comparison of the Influence of Television Programming and Advertising Content On the Consumer Social Comparison Process: Any Changes between 2003 and 2013?

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Speck (2011) documented the effects of television content, both programming and advertising, on consumers in the U.S., as well as those in developing countries, through the lens of social comparison theory. This research specifically associates social comparison theory with the observation that many consumers use television advertising and programming content as a basis for comparison for self-image, how one should look and dress.

In light of its continuing importance in the realm of global communications, the present research seek to determine if these effects hold true ten years later. While the number of competing media has multiplied in recent years, the total global television adspend remains the largest of any medium, with 39% of global spend in 2014. Are those marketing dollars continuing to yield the same impact on the consumers via the social comparison process today as they did a decade ago?

To answer that question, we compare two snapshots in time of the importance ratings reported by students regarding television advertising, as well as programming content, for two stages of social comparison: setting the standard for comparison and the outcome of the comparison process. The sample for the two studies are from the United States, as well as from Lebanon, Croatia, India, and China. While the results are mixed in terms of the change in influence, there are significant differences for all countries in terms of the importance assigned to television programming and advertising with regard to the social comparison process.