

Chapter 12

SUPER SUPER BOWL ADS

I am one who believes that one of the greatest dangers of advertising is not that of misleading people but that of boring them to death.

—Leo Burnett

Super Bowl ads represent a unique viewing opportunity for advertisers. It is one of the few times a year when the ads are viewed with anticipation and excitement, almost as much as the game itself. And every year these 50 or so ads help shape the future of advertising.

In terms of audiences, the Super Bowl is the highest-reach event of the year. Viewers in 2015 were anticipated to number over 114 million; one in two households in America tuned in. The game is also

unique in that many watch it with a group of other people representing a range of ages.

As a result of the game's huge reach and its prestigious display of the pinnacle of advertising art, Super Bowl ad rates are the highest in history—\$4.5 million for 30 seconds or \$150,000 per second in 2015.

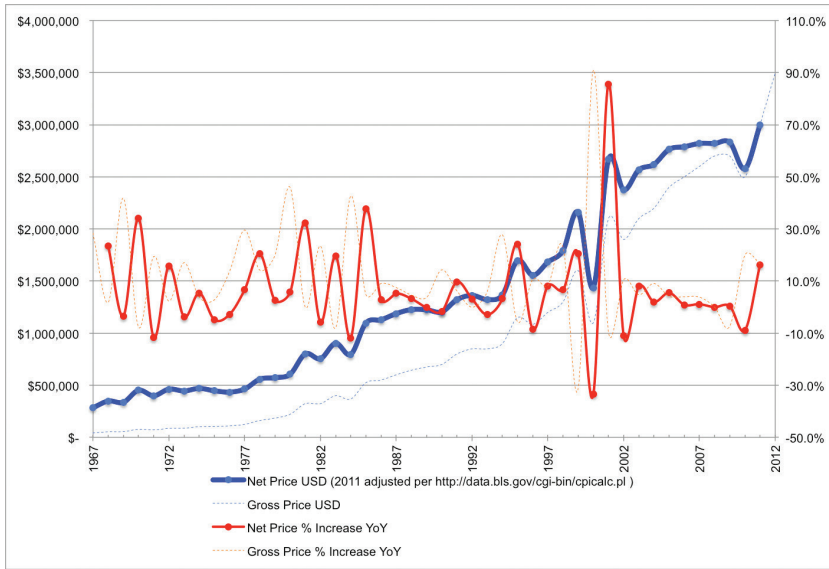


Figure 42: Super Bowl ad rates per 30-second spot and percent growth versus the prior year. Source: "Superbowl 30sec 2011 adjusted" by Dsuchter - Own work. Licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0 via Wikimedia Commons. http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Superbowl_30sec_2011_adjusted.png#/media/File:Superbowl_30sec_2011_adjusted.png

Given the career-making or breaking risk, the Super Bowl is no place to wing it. While some Super Bowl ads take calculated risks, it's insanity not to test reactions with audiences ahead of time. Ad strategies used during the Super Bowl vary, but every year we see classic mistakes. As a result, it's important to understand how these

ads work, especially since these ads often kick off new trends and are imitated throughout the year.

In 2015, we put together a database of all 315 Super Bowl ads since 2010. While the number of ads represents 0.0007 percent of all ads in the Ace database, they often are the most memorable and successful.

In the 2015 Super Bowl, Budweiser, Coca-Cola, Snickers, Mercedes-Benz, Microsoft, Dodge, and Doritos were among the Top 10 Most Effective Super Bowl Ads. But McDonald's achieved the overall top score with an Ace Score of 706, which is about as common as a perfect game in Major League Baseball. Of all ads aired between 2011 and 2015, only 0.06 percent of them have scored above 700. McDonald's achieved Super Bowl gold, surprising and delighting consumers and changing perceptions about the fast-food giant.

Top 10 Super Bowl 2015 Ads by Ace Score

Rank	Brand	Ad Title	Powered By	Ace Score
1	McDonald's	(SB15) Pay With Lovin'	Likeability, Emotion	706
2	Budweiser	(SB15) Lost Dog	Attention, Likeability, Emotion	652
2	Coca-Cola	(SB15) #MakeItHappy	Likeability, Relevance, Emotion	652
2	Snickers	(SB 15) The Brady Bunch	Likeability, Desire	652
5	Mercedes-Benz	(SB15) Fable	Attention, Likeability, Emotion	649
6	Microsoft	(SB15) Braylon O'Neill	Attention, Likeability, Information, Change	646
7	Dodge	(SB15) Official Dodge Wisdom	Likeability, Emotion	644
8	Doritos	(SB15) When Pigs Fly	Attention, Likeability, Desire	643
9	Always	(SB 15) #LikeAGirl	Likeability	636
10	Doritos	(SB15) Middle Seat	Attention, Likeability	631

Figure 43

In today's highly cluttered media environment where consumers are increasingly inclined and enabled to avoid ads, it's crucial to find ways to get them to stop and watch your ad. Super Bowl ads are

under greater scrutiny because the competitive set of ads aired during the game is of a very high caliber. Further, it is well-established that a powerful driver of success is the ability of the ad to emotionally penetrate viewers' hearts and minds. Not only does the McDonald's ad accomplish this in spades, it does it in a surprising way: it taps into the powerful emotions inherent in the durable love of family and friends and implicitly, yet legitimately, connects that emotion with the long-term presence the McDonald's brand has had in our lives and communities—overall, a beautifully executed ad.



Figure 44

The Super Bowl provides advertisers with the largest and most demographically diverse audience available on TV. Here is the list of the top Super Bowl ads over the past five years based on aggregate Ace Score.

Top 20 Highest Scoring Long-Format Super Bowl Ads (60 seconds or longer), 2011-2015

Brand	Ad Title	Ad Length	Ace Score	Year
Microsoft	Empowering	0:60	710	2014
McDonald's	Pay With Lovin'	0:60	706	2015
Budweiser	Puppy Love	0:60	681	2014
Budweiser	Hero's Welcome	0:60	675	2014
Budweiser	Brotherhood	0:60	665	2013
Coca-Cola	The Catch	0:60	654	2012
Budweiser	Lost Dog	0:60	652	2015
Coca-Cola	#MakeltHappy	0:60	652	2015
Mercedes-Benz	Fable	0:60	649	2015
Microsoft	Braylon O'Neill	0:60	646	2015
Dodge	Official Dodge Wisdom	0:60	644	2015
Always	#LikeAGirl	0:60	636	2015
Chrysler	It's Half Time America	2:00	633	2012
Honda	Matthew's Day Off	0:60	630	2012
Pepsi	Kings Court	0:60	628	2012
Mercedes-Benz	Soul	0:60	626	2013
Toyota	Joy Ride	0:60	625	2014
Jeep	This Land Is Your Land	1:30	625	2015
Kia	The Perfect Getaway	0:60	624	2015
Jaguar	Rendezvous	0:60	623	2014

Figure 45

SHIFT TO POSITIVE MESSAGING

For the past few years, we've seen a gradual shift away from sheer shock value and slapstick humor toward positive, emotionally connective Super Bowl ads. McDonald's is on-trend with messages of positivity that really resonate with consumers, and nearly every ad in the 2015 Super Bowl Top 10 embraced this emotional connection, with the exception of Doritos and Snickers, which won on Humor, Attention, Likeability, and Desire.

Positive messaging poses less risk of offending viewers. We have seen the trend away from humorous ads that have the potential to alienate part of the huge viewing audience. It's hard to offend someone with an anti-bullying message or a message about the importance of being a good dad. With all the sentimentality, advertisers also run the risk of being boring or sad at a time when audiences are expecting to be entertained—especially if you watch three or four deep, emotional

ads in a row. It will be interesting to see if future Super Bowl crops will go back to more humor and less intense emotion.

In some cases, the “do-good” messaging almost went too far in 2015. In Nationwide’s ad, “Boy,” viewers expressed shock at the message of avoiding childhood accidents when they realized the boy character died and was not able to enjoy growing up. Some viewers were offended, and many lit up social media with complaints that the ad killed the positive mood of Super Bowl parties. Yet the ad generated some of the highest awareness of any ad at the Super Bowl.

CELEBRITIES: SECRETS OF SUCCESS OR RECIPE FOR DISASTER

As we discussed earlier, celebrities are no guarantee of a successful ad. While celebrities make appearances in one-third of all Super Bowl ads, only one celebrity ad ranked within the top ten highest-scoring Super Bowl ads between 2012 and 2015. In 2014, RadioShack broke this trend by generating a celebrity-laden ad that was the fourth-highest-scoring ad over a five-year period (Ace Score 677). The ad featured not one but a full cast of characters from the ’80s to effectively make fun of itself and announce a new launch of the stores. The celebrities in this case—Hulk Hogan, Mary Lou Retton, Alf, Chucky, Cliff from *Cheers*, and a slew of other time-stamped characters—were used to parody themselves rather than to endorse the brand or leverage current celebrity power to earn brand buzz. However, the ad, while well received, did little to change the fortunes of the retail chain, which filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection in 2015.

The pattern continued in 2015. Of the top ten scoring ads, only one ad featured celebrities. This was the Snickers ad spoofing the ’70s

Brady Bunch TV series. The Snickers theme of “You’re not yourself when you’re hungry” has cleverly woven celebrity appearances into the ad storyline for several years. The success of this ad is the strength of the script and use of the characters in a humorous but relevant way.

As we discussed earlier, in the context of general advertising, celebrity ads more typically fall at the bottom of the list. In 2015, Kim Kardashian, one of the most polarizing figures in America, and actor Jeff Bridges, featured in an odd ad for Squarespace, both failed to connect with viewers. In fact, eight of the ten lowest-scoring ads of Super Bowls since 2010 include celebrities (four of the eight are GoDaddy ads, and the rest are by Hulu and the beer brands Bud Light, Michelob, and Stella). When the premium for Super Bowl ad time is so high, why wouldn’t brands avoid the celebrity risk or, at a minimum, make sure that their ads are thoroughly tested first? As mentioned earlier, brands need to understand that any celebrity they select will be disliked by a certain number of viewers. Almost every celebrity—even Oprah—has their haters. In addition, celebrities can’t carry the whole story. If they are relevant to the script, as they are in Snickers ads, they can be very effective, but just because a celebrity is featured does not make an ad a success.

IT’S ABOUT CUTE, NOT SEXY

Eight of the top ten Super Bowl ads since 2010 have included an adorable kid or a furry mammal, while the ten ads that make up the bottom performers lack either. Broad TV audiences, such as those who watch the Super Bowl, find animals much more appealing than scantily clad men or women in a sex-themed ad. None of the top ten ads (or the top 26, in fact) could be described as “sexy,” whereas

four of the bottom ten ads attempt to appeal sexually. Overall, the Super Bowl's sexy ads performed 8.3 percent lower than ads without a sexy theme. Budweiser, a perennial user of dogs and horses, scored another top emotional ad with "Lost Puppy" in 2015.

LONGER IS BETTER

While the net cost of airtime during the game has risen significantly year over year, advertisers are increasingly extending their spots to take full advantage of the captive audience. In the 2015 game, 43 percent of the ads ran for 45 seconds or longer compared to 18 percent in 2010 and 20 percent in 2011. When looked at in aggregate, Super Bowl ads earn stronger scores as their duration increases. The average Ace Score rose from 529 for a 15-second spot to 572 for a 60-second spot, and ads lasting longer than 60 seconds averaged a score of 580. Why? Because when creative teams have more time, they can create more emotional storytelling using the longer format. In 2014, for example, Microsoft and two Budweiser ads earned top scores for their long-form ads (60 seconds), all three delivering emotionally powerful stories.

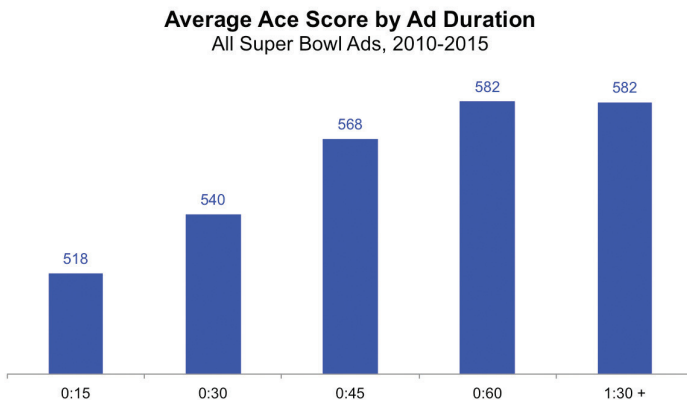


Figure 46

SOCIAL MEDIA INTERACTION

In 2014, advertisers started a trend that continued in 2015. They took heed that isolating one-half of their audience with highly targeted, crass, or otherwise offensive ads is, at best, a waste of money and, at worst, damaging to the brand. In fact, fewer advertisers attempted humor than in previous years. In 2015 less than half (49 percent) were funny as opposed to 64 percent of ads in 2014 and 72 percent in 2013. The funny ads of the Super Bowl scored 563, slightly less than the ads that weren't funny, which scored 573 on average.

In recent years, brands have focused on social engagement to extend viewership of the ad aired during the game to the weeks surrounding the game. Expanding advertising's largest stage beyond whistle-to-whistle is not a new concept. In 2015, we saw some aspects of the social-media-integration plateau. Eleven percent of advertisers in 2015 and 2014 incorporated a blatant use of fan participation in conjunction with their airtime exposure. Bud Light, Carnival Cruises, Doritos, as well as newcomer brands Avocados from Mexico, Dove, and Locktite published their fan strategies prior to game day. This included voting for ads to air, signing up for extended content, or entering a contest. About 50 percent of Super Bowl ads in 2015 were given their own hashtag.

2013 was the year of Super Bowl leaks. Super Bowl 47 marked a significant awakening for advertisers. Gone were the days of advertisers throwing all their eggs into a single Super Bowl basket. Until 2013, brands shrouded their ads in secrecy and sometimes even hid their participation in the Super Bowl until the ads aired on game day. Starting in 2013, however, there was a shift in which 50 percent

of all advertising brands issued a teaser ad either online or on TV in the weeks leading up to the game. Forty-six percent actually released their game-day ad early, in stark contrast to prior years, shifting the Super Bowl from a one-ad experience to an extended social media campaign.

Today, Super Bowl advertisers leverage their ad on game day as part of an overall event. In 2015 more than half of the ads were released on social media before the game, and more advertisers released teasers or longer-form versions of the actual game-day content.

THE YEAR OF AMERICAN STORIES

It was at Super Bowl 46 (2012) when more advertisers decided that while 30-second ads were relatively cheaper, 60 seconds or longer was better, and what better time to tell your story than during the Super Bowl? Many of those 60-second ads had a strong patriotic pull, whether a call to arms or tribute. It's here that we saw Clint Eastwood's two-minute ad, "It's Halftime in America"; GE's 45-second ad, "Building Something Big in Louisville"; and Budweiser's ad that harkened back to early post-prohibition nationalism.

While particularly concentrated in 2012, patriotism continues to be a theme used by Super Bowl advertisers. Ads reflecting the American spirit—the value of a farmer in Dodge's Paul Harvey rendition in 2013 (and others) or Budweiser's 2014 salute to veterans, "Hero's Welcome"—capitalize on positive national pride. Automotive floor mat maker WeatherTech appealed to national pride with an ad featuring its use of US suppliers and its employment of US workers.

UNTESTED DUDS

Finally, there are the duds. Every year it seems some brands are content to not test their ads before pushing them out on Super Bowl Sunday—with disastrous results. Many of these offenders have been Internet brands, such as Squarespace, Living Social, Groupon, Hulu, GoldieBlox, and, perennial favorite, GoDaddy. While some of these duds may have been trying to achieve some kind of shock value, the Super Bowl is not the place for such brand risks. In addition, ads such as Jublia's toe fungus treatment in 2015, while certainly driving awareness, fell flat with a Super Bowl audience and scored poorly. Ads for ailments such as toe fungus, incontinence, erectile dysfunction, and even overtly sexual ads typically bomb in a Super Bowl setting with such a massive and diverse audience. People just don't want to see them, at least, not during the Super Bowl and especially in a group setting.

All Super Bowl ads can be seen at acemetrix.com.