

The trends game at the Super Bowl

 By Louise Marsland

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It's the greatest American sporting event this weekend: the Super Bowl. And what is trending more than the football, globally, is the advertising, which is among the most expensive 30 seconds in the world.

Since most of the world doesn't play or follow American football, it should be of little concern to us. However, the advertising unveiled at the Super Bowl, during the precious half-time break, as well as before, by brands, is becoming as important and is watched by more people the world over, than the actual football game.

We don't understand the game much and the full body 'armour' required. Down here, we think that's a bit *naff* actually, because we have real sport: rugby and soccer. (And yes, I had to ask Google when the Super Bowl was happening.) But we have watched or still will watch some of the Super Bowl advertising commercials. Either because we're 'in' the industry and actively seek them out or because the ads go viral and someone in our network sends them to us because they are memorable.

This is why... Super Bowl Sunday is broken up into three elements: the actual football game, which as we know is big in the US of A; the half-time show, where entertainers vie for the best act, best costume, best collaboration, etc (remember the infamous Janet Jackson nip slip?); and the most memorable commercials.

There is a formula for Super Bowl ads: funny or memorable. They often include big stars, big brands and big ideas. So why do people actively sit down to watch these ads and comment on them and vote the best and the worst, when they often fast forward/PVR-TiVo/channel hop through other advertising?



Budweiser ad - Image via YouTube

A Super Bowl ad spot costs on average \$4.5m for 30 seconds, to reach over 100 million American consumers who tune in live on Super Bowl Sunday - half of which have admitted they only tune in to watch the ads in real time (Source: [Forbes](#)). These days, advertisers release their Super Bowl ads or trailers about their Super Bowl ads, weeks in advance to create buzz. The slots are sold out months ahead of the game each year.

[Forbes magazine](#) unpacked the popularity as follows: "Super Bowl ads are designed to resonate with the target market. These ads communicate more than just the product; trust, loyalty and commitment are key components between the company and its consumer/viewer. A few companies consistently produce high quality, entertaining and effective advertising, i.e., advertising that entices the consumer to purchase the product."

In fact, they are seen as part of the entertainment. They are often brave. They are witty, outright funny, tearjerkers, brilliant in their execution. Often controversial (often unintentionally so). And they all started out with a creative team and an idea. The conclusion is that every commercial at every other time should be "Super Bowl quality" and resonate with the target market, right?

It is becoming a trend - other big events such as the Golden Globes, Oscars, World Cup Soccer and Olympics have in recent years started cashing in on this trend more and brands have got involved, as have broadcasters in the hype around top TV shows.

The big gamechanger of course is social media, where viewers have a big audience for their witty repartee about the ads and everything else around any big event, which draws big viewership. It's like sitting on a couch with a few million of your funniest friends. It has been great for great advertising - going viral means a global audience. But of course, great advertising still has to sell something.

Top Super Bowl 2015 ads

Super Bowl ad trends in 2014 showed that consumers are willing to watch ads of 45 - 60 seconds if there is a great story to be told - in 2014. 43% of ads were 45 seconds or longer, with the majority of ads being 60 seconds. [Forbes](#) reported that marketers are becoming more "savvy" in integrating humour into the message and playing to a bigger stage.

Storytelling really started coming into its own in recent years, with 25% of the Super Bowl ads in 2014 featuring stories of patriotism and heroes (Budweiser, Coca-Cola, Chevrolet and Chrysler). And of course, 67% of ads go for the "funny". There is actually a "funny index" (of course) and apparently the 2014 ads posted the lowest score in five years. The reason was that marketers are getting smarter with humour rather than risking "polarising" certain sectors of their consumer base.

Inc.com has a list of the [Top 10 Most Watched Super Bowl Ads of All Time](#). Doritos wins this list.

And it isn't always about pulling the biggest celebrity - polls showed that Super Bowl ads are underperforming consistently on the 'celeb index'. Trends this year show some big advertisers, particularly car makers, are passing on ads, as are other big brands, including some sponsors of the Super Bowl, like Dannon. Cost is given as a factor. But there will be new, young brands participating this year, like website builder, Wix.com, BuzzFeed and The Verge.

The online and offline action is where some advertisers are opting to go - [Facebook](#) is hosting its own Super Bowl advertising push.



Volvo ad - Image via YouTube

But there will be some of the same, reports [Time](#): "Unsurprisingly, there will be ads selling beer and tearjerkers featuring lost puppies - one does both at the same time ([Budweiser](#)), and there will be at least one commercial flashing a nearly naked woman walking in public, thanks to perennial provocateur [Carl's Jr.](#)"

Judge for yourself with the latest crop of 2015 Super Bowl ads...

We already have the first controversy as Go Daddy pulled its ad on Wednesday after backlash. Given the target audience, you would think that puppies would be a good bet every time? This is a more conscientious consumer and [Go Daddy](#) have been accused of promoting puppy mills. They pulled their ad within 24 hours of it being released online and apologised, reports AdWeek.

So, here's some crib notes for Monday, when everyone else is talking about this ad and that ad. The [Budweiser 'Lost Dog'](#) and [Unilever's Dove Men 'Real Strength'](#) ads are the tearjerkers of the day (and I don't cry easily).

[Refinery29.com](#) has the best compilation I found so far in a nifty slide show (if you can just ignore the ubiquitous Kardashians appearance). And look out for the 1994 clip of talk show hosts trying to understand the internet in the BMW ad - hysterical!

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