

The Most Engaging Ads of Super Bowl LIV: Doritos, Google, Michelob Ultra

An Ipsos Creative Excellence Point of View

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Humor, emotion, celebrity and music. These are four elements that characterized the most emotionally engaging ads of this year's Super Bowl. Leading the pack of over sixty spots for brands was Doritos "The Cool Ranch" ad, which at its peak successfully engaged 76% of those in our audience. This was followed by Google's "Loretta" (74%) and Michelob Ultra's "Jimmy Works It Out" (73%). No other ad exceeded 70%—though Little Caesars "Sliced Bread" and Michelob Ultra Gold's "Six for Six Pack" came close.

So, what was the secret sauce for these three ads? The lighthearted snack and beer brands based their ads on humor and celebrity, with Doritos adding a hearty helping of country trap music and Michelob Ultra a dash of late-night jazz. Conversely, Google broke through the noise with a deeply quiet ad that drew us in and made us cry, successfully humanizing a search bar and computerized home assistant.

Doritos "The Cool Ranch"

The Doritos ad featured rapper Lil Nas X and "A Star Is Born" actor Sam Elliott, spanning generations and genres in a humorous music dance-off punctuated by a cameo from songwriter Billy Ray Cyrus. The ad held attention for the full 60 seconds, inspiring emotional responses from 40% of viewers on average and never dropping below 21%.

The commercial experienced two strong peaks of emotion. The highest point in this ad, and, therefore in the whole Super Bowl, was when the song "Old Town Road" kicked in, and people realized what was going on. In 2019, we noted that well



Doritos "The Cool Ranch"

known music is often more engaging in Super Bowl ads than celebrities ([link](#)). That seems to be borne out again here.

While branding was minimal for most of the ad, the tonality of the humor—serious and silly at the same time—felt distinctly Doritos. And the well-earned ultimate enjoyment of the Dorito chip gave the product an integral role in the story. When finally introduced, the bright blue bag stood out against Lil Nas' black jacket, horse and speaker-laden saddle. Branding was further reinforced by the "Cool Ranch" signage off in the distance. The final hero shot led to one final spike in engagement with the familiar Doritos bag front and center, standing out from the dusty countryside and accented by a #CoolRanchDance hashtag.

Google "Loretta"

Google's use of music was so soft and subtle that most didn't notice it, but the quietude of this ad was a sharp contrast to most of the evening's broadcast and succeeded in drawing people in. As with Google's first Super Bowl ad ten years ago about finding love in Paris, this ad humanized the brand through an emotional and relatable love story. At a time

when people are living longer, and memory loss is something that has touched many of us personally, this story resonated broadly and deeply.

"Loretta" started strong, pulling in 55% of viewers with the query: "how to not forget." It then dropped off with the less personal research about the town of Juneau but picked up with the collection of photos and videos, rising further with the Casablanca clip, and picking up speed



Loretta always said,
don't miss me too much, and
get out of the dang house

May 14, 2017

Google "Loretta"

with the recap of things to remember. The ad peaked with a touch of bitter-sweet humor: “Loretta always said, don’t miss me too much, and get out of the dang house” and ended on an overall high with the Google logo. Overall, this ad built emotion throughout to achieve a final payoff that successfully humanized the brand.

Michelob Ultra “Jimmy Works It Out”

Michelob Ultra’s “Jimmy Works It Out” peaked right away when Jimmy Fallon inadvertently hurled a kettlebell through the window of his fitness studio. This comedic stunt immediately engaged 73% of viewers. Emotional involvement then dropped as the “problem” portion of this problem-solution ad was laid out. Fewer than 20% of viewers showed an emotional response when Jimmy complained that “working out sucks” while drinking Michelob Ultra with training partner and pro wrestler John Cena. In fact, 0% of viewers were highly engaged at this point.



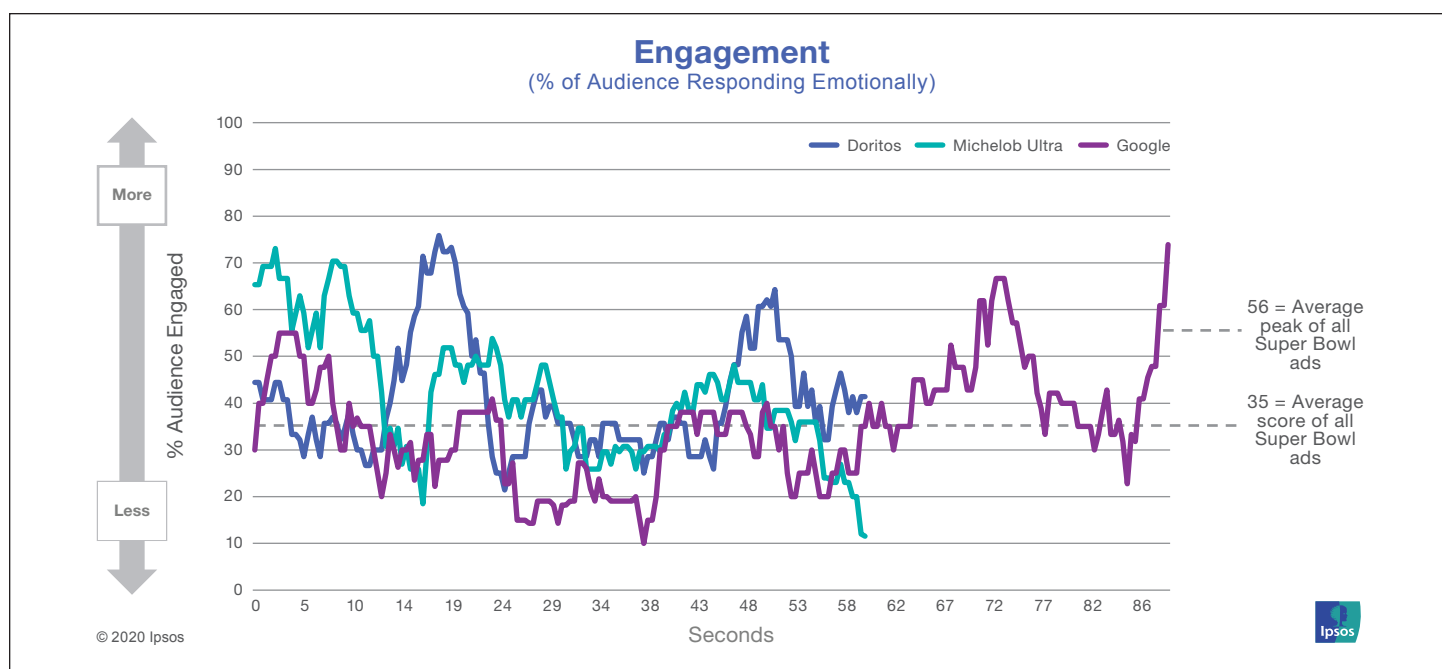
Michelob Ultra “Jimmy Works It Out”

Engagement recovered quickly when Jimmy’s house band Roots joined him on the track with motivating live music—again reflecting the power of music to draw people in. While the ad continued to have little peaks with cameo appearances by numerous accomplished athletes (Usain Bolt, Brooks Koepka, Kerri Walsh Jennings, Brooke Sweat), it did not reach the level of the opening exploit. Each peak was slightly lower,

and attention petered out during the closing scene back at the bar.

Summary

In summary, our top three ads inspired very different patterns of engagement. Doritos “The Cool Ranch” started slowly and took off with the introduction of a popular song and entertaining antics. It maintained engagement, inspiring two strong peaks, and ended on a high.



Michelob Ultra “Jimmy Works It Out” captured attention right away, lost engagement during a lull in the action, rose again with music and then petered out at the end. Google built engagement slowly and steadily leading to a powerful payoff and the strongest emotional response of the ad.

Online chatter following the Super Bowl would suggest that Google left the longest lasting impression of the three ads. That is consistent with general Ipsos learnings that ending on an emotional high leads to strong recall of an ad ([link](#)).

About the Study

These are some of the findings of an Ipsos live study conducted on February 2, 2020. The scores are based on passive emotional responses from an audience of 40 people recruited to watch the Super Bowl at a screening event in New York City. Each viewer was fitted with a Shimmer wrist bracelet and finger sensor to capture galvanic skin response (GSR), which reflects the extent to which their emotions are aroused at any moment.

While we know that emotional engagement by itself isn’t an exact predictor of overall advertising success, it’s a key factor for Super Bowl advertising and it’s a strong indicator of long-term brand health and saliency.

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