



The Super Bowl Creative Tool Box: As Full as You Think?

An Ipsos **Point of View**
by Pedr Howard and Tyler Colligan

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Each year roughly 100 million Americans turn on the big game, mostly to see the NFL crown its new World Champion, but also to see what the folks from Madison Avenue have cooked up. No other single event allows creatives to garner such a captive audience. A big opportunity for sure, but at \$5.25 million for just 30 seconds, a lot of responsibility as well. And so, marketers try to pull out all the stops.

Agencies are allowed to push the envelope creatively, producing some truly memorable spots over the years, but also opening the door to some old industry crutches. Celebrities and spokespeople are trotted out, special effects budgets are akin to that of the game's typically over-the-top halftime show and agencies employ iconic music choices to make sure their ads catch the attention of their ever-valuable target audiences.

With this once-annual budgetary freedom it would stand to reason that creating best-in-class ads was a foregone conclusion, but the immediate industry reaction this year seemed muted, with many commentators decrying a lack of risk taking and a somewhat vanilla spread. It is true that some of the themes were derivative, in that they followed trends that were successful in previous years. Data-driven marketing is on the rise, and clearly some brands are trying to replicate past successes, either from themselves or others. That's a safe strategy, but can sometimes limit the power of creative magic to break out of the box and deliver truly unexpectedly great creative. It's possible that you can end up with a sea of 'good' ads but very few 'great' ads (but also, potentially, less big mistakes).

According to a recent study conducted by Ipsos using the latest in neuro-research capabilities in real-time, some of these creative devices may not deliver the bang for the buck one would expect. We examined several 'standards' of Super Bowl advertising with some good, and some bad, news for marketers. Ipsos recruited an audience of 35 people to a private screening at a downtown Chicago location to watch the whole Super Bowl, including commercials, in a movie theater, with snacks and beverages. Participants could bring friends in order to recreate a realistic viewing environment. Each viewer was fitted with a Shimmer wrist bracelet and finger sensor to passively capture galvanic skin response (GSR*). This allowed us to measure, passively and in real time, emotional engagement throughout the whole event, including every commercial aired in the Chicago area.



This protest scene, from Google's 'Billion Words' commercial, saw the highest emotional response of any commercial during Super Bowl LIII

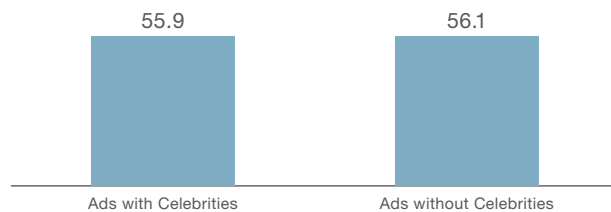
Celebrities: Guaranteed win?

The use of celebrity in advertising is nothing new. But does the high profile offered by celebrities guarantee the ads (and importantly, the brands!) also enjoy this attention? Perhaps not. Of the 61 brand ads analyzed by Ipsos, 40% utilized well known personalities to push the creative over the top. However, the maximum peak engagement** for ads featuring celebrities, and ads that did not, showed little difference.

In fact, only one of the Top 5 highest performers employed this strategy. That ad, #3 on the list, Amazon Alexa's 'Not Everything Makes the Cut' was highly engaging for several reasons and featured not one but two A-listers—both Harrison Ford and Forest Whitaker. While the Super Bowl may be a good excuse to throw caution to the wind, that kind of star power is likely not feasible for many of the brands placing spots in the game.

Max Peak Emotional Engagement

(As Measured by Galvanic Skin Response)



Ok, so maybe celebrities don't guarantee you'll have the *best* ad in the game, but surely they should keep you out of the bottom of the pack, right? Well, again, maybe not. One third of the bottom 25% of ads in our list featured these personalities, better than the overall 40%, but not by much. This is not to say that the celebrities themselves are at fault for these ads' weaker performance necessarily. Expensify's ad featuring Adam Scott and 2Chainz likely left many consumers somewhat confused, and Buble's Bubly may have lacked some pop during the game after extensively being teased and released early, but the outcome was not as positive as those marketers had hoped when they signed on.

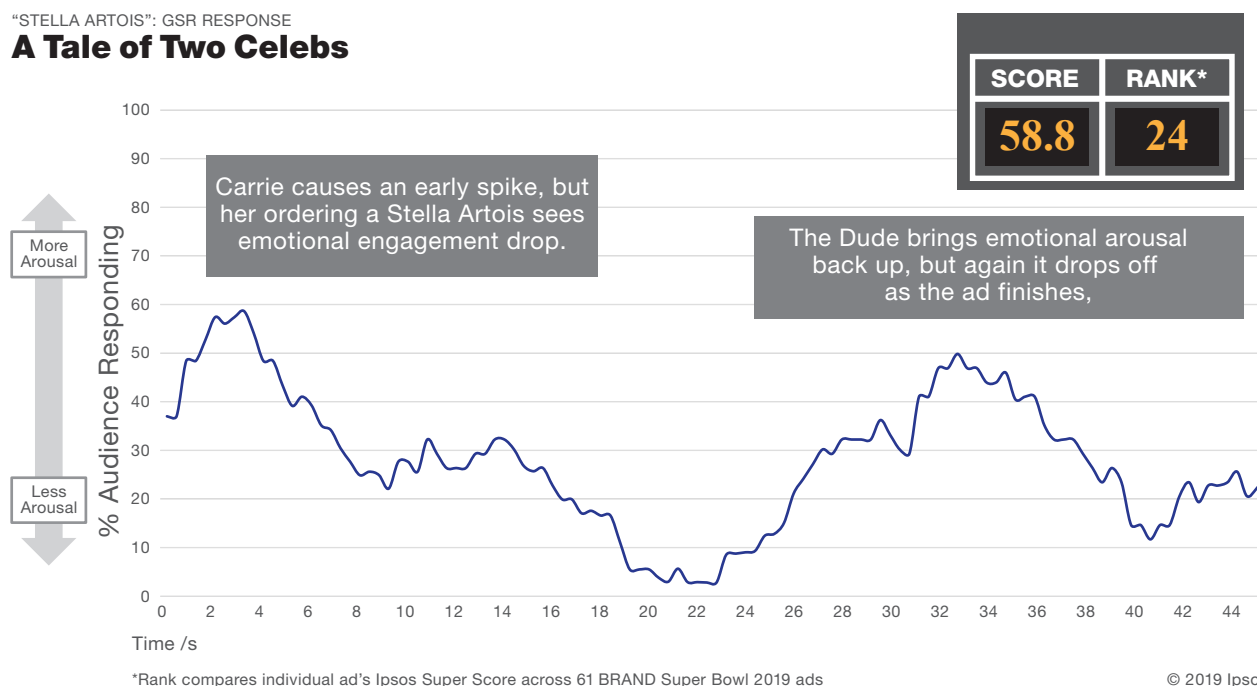


Did pre-releasing Buble's Bubly ad limit the surprise during the game?

Stella Artois bought some emotional engagement with their rekindling of Carrie Bradshaw and the Dude, but as is often seen in celebrity ads, this commercial may have done so at the expense of the brand itself—emotional engagement jumps twice at the introduction of the celebrities, but a deeper analysis of this commercial is needed to understand whether this had an appropriate lift for the brand, or not.

"STELLA ARTOIS": GSR RESPONSE

A Tale of Two Celebs



It's important to also note that these ads have only been evaluated *including* the celebrities we're talking about, and we don't have a way to gauge performance sans the benefit of their personalities, so they very well may be contributing positively, by turning a below average execution into an average one, for example.

If celebrities aren't a surefire win, is there anything else that can help? Luckily Ipsos' analysis also identified that one long-time industry perception isn't just a myth.

Music Beats

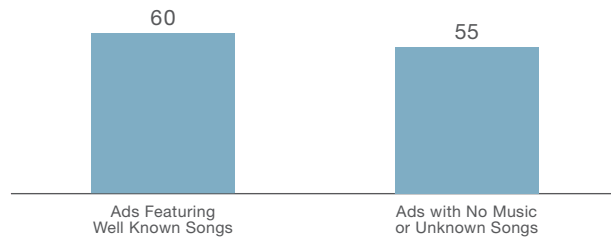
People connect with music, and this connection can help ads stand out. Ads containing songs that are well known to at least a good portion of the viewing audience exhibit higher peak engagement than spots either not including music, or music that consumers don't know. Well known songs were used in 32% of all spots, but nearly half of the highest scoring quarter of ads. Comparatively, only 27% of the lowest scoring ads featured familiar songs.

It's likely that the music wasn't the only factor in driving some of these ads' success, but there is evidence that it's helping.

Just any music won't do however. When most effective, the music chosen contributes to both the narrative and the engagement of the ad. For example, T Mobile's 'Text' campaign utilized song choice to both catch the attention of consumers and punctuate the story in both its 'Lyft Driver' and 'Keep It Brief' executions. When songs, even if well known, have less impact they are often used as more of a soundtrack or background music, simply to grab the ear of consumers rather than play a critical and thoughtful role in the creative. Luckily, and to the credit of the agencies and marketers developing the ads for this unique occasion, several examples of this synergy did shine in this year's game.

Max Peak Emotional Engagement

(As Measured by Galvanic Skin Response)



Are you Ready for some Football?

The Super Bowl is all about football after all, right? Because of this many marketers over the years have tried to tie in some aspect of the sport within their ads. This year's crop only featured a handful (less than 10%) of ads that utilize this tie-in, to mixed results. The average peak engagement of these ads was quite similar to those ads that did not show any football in the creative (55% vs. 56%) and their average ranking was 32 out of 61—right in the middle. This is not to say that it can never be a strong creative magnifier, as it is relevant and timely, but the content must warrant the inclusion.



One ad that did elicit strong emotional engagement was 'Toni' by Toyota that featured the story of the first woman to receive a scholarship offer to play in college. This powerful and empowering story is a piece of what makes this ad work, not just the football tie-in.

Tell Us a Joke

Humor is another standby of Super Bowl advertising in years past, and this year was no different. Just over a third of ads in this year's game utilize humor as a major piece of the creative direction. These ads tend towards higher engagement, averaging a peak of 59% compared to ads with a more serious tone coming in at 54.5%. Humor is certainly a useful tool to help grab consumers' attention and make ads memorable but again does not ensure success. As a double-edged sword of sorts, it can both catch the eyes and ears of viewers, but often overshadow the brand, so great care in planning should be taken to keep the advertiser front and center. That said, when used well, it can push ads forward as we see in the case of the Alexa ad's quite strong engagement.

What Does This Mean Moving Forward?

In developing creative for the Super Bowl, or anytime, it is important to have a clear vision of how you want your ad to work, and what levers you'll pull to get there from the start. Sometimes this may mean that featuring a celebrity fits the narrative you're trying to craft, sometimes it won't. Sometimes spending the money on an iconic song will push your ad over the top, sometimes the story can be told without this element. These decisions must be made on a case by case basis, but in general, this study would indicate spending the money on music gives you a bigger bang for your buck than paying a celebrity for a Super Bowl cameo.

"Rules are for the guidance of wise men and the obedience of fools."

DOUGLAS BADER

In this analysis we see that effective song choice can be quite powerful and celebrities may not be the silver bullet one would hope for, football tie-ins are hit-and-miss and humor can definitely help drive engagement, but these are just guidelines. Even within this year's game there are examples that lie outside these standards. Good creative is made by good creatives, telling a story—and just sometimes that includes using some of the old staples—thoughtfully and with purpose.

**Galvanic Skin Response (GSR) is one type of biometric measurement used to understand emotional response. GSR measures skin conductance as a physiological indication of emotional arousal. This emotional arousal, also defined as emotional intensity or excitement power, gives us insight into the level of emotional engagement generated by an ad, with the ability to pinpoint which specific moments within the ad were most engaging. Please note: Biometrics cannot indicate the valence (direction for positive/negative) or tone of the emotional response.*

***Maximum Peak Engagement is used throughout as a measure of emotional engagement power for each commercial. It indicates the highest % of the audience who were 'emotionally aroused' at any single point during a commercial.*

About Ipsos

At Ipsos we are passionately curious about people, markets, brands and society. We deliver information and analysis that makes our complex world easier and faster to navigate and inspires our clients to make smarter decisions. With a strong presence in 90 countries, Ipsos employs more than 18,000 people and conducts research programs in more than 100 countries. Founded in France in 1975, Ipsos is controlled and managed by research professionals.

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GAME CHANGERS

