

Playing not to lose: what we saw trending this Super Bowl

THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

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Did the brands play to win or did they play not to lose?

A Super Bowl TV spot alone, according to our study of the past 10 years of results, tends to be ROI negative¹. It requires a cross channel activation including PR and Social, working as a system, to deliver positive returns.

With each passing Super Bowl getting more expensive, it has become harder for brands to squeeze benefits from its investment in the space. The Super Bowl and the ads in it this year, if social media were any indication of consumer sentiment, was one of the most lackluster ones in recent history – there was an increase in negative commentary by 75% – some called it the most boring Super Bowl ever.

In a highly defensive game, did we see most of the brands participate in a more defensive way?

Apart from the weirdly, overwhelming use of robots in the ads and many of the brands being food and drink heavy, here are three trends we saw and will leave the outcomes for the brands to be the eventual judge of the winners:

1. **A huddled-up play:** One of the most memorable moments was the collaboration of Bud Light and GoT because of the surprising unexpected twist it had. We also saw T-Mobile collaborate with Taco Bell and Lyft. This could be a trending approach where combining equities and investments lower the barriers to success. The question is: were they memorable enough, in a medium that is proven to be 10x² more likely to deliver Ad Awareness than Brand Awareness?

2. **A game for rookies:** New Brands and ones that don't tend to advertise on TV much (such as Fiji Water or Wix.com), tend to disproportionately benefit from the Super Bowl. They see the most gains in awareness, consideration and purchase intent.² We saw a bevy of new brands & products: [M&M'S chocolate tablet bar](#), Mirror, Toyota Supra, ABI's Bon & Viv to name a few.

3. **A change to the game plan:** Among brands that advertised in the Super Bowl over the last 4 years, 48% of spots were used for larger equity messaging of existing brands². This Super Bowl, while brands like Coke tried to inspire togetherness, we saw existing brands focus less on overall brand equity and more on product differentiation as part of equity. Bud Light spent a lot of monies focusing on the fact that Coors used corn syrup and they did not. Let's hope for them that people care about that fact – or they just spent a lot of monies putting Coors up in their Super Bowl ads, while Stella provoked you to try change up the usual.

Of course, there are other way brands can lean into benefiting from the massive cultural

moment of the Super Bowl. [Skittles](#) did just that with their 30-minute live Broadway musical on Sunday at 1pm, [Uber](#) gave out free rides home to everyone who had signed up to Uber Rewards and were in the city that would lose the game.

One thing's for sure, brands will continue to play in and around the Super Bowl, and perhaps the brand winners and losers will become more nail-biting than the teams on the field...

1. MediaCom ROI Benchmarks
2. YouGov Analysis (Super Bowl 2015-2017)

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