

THE EFFECT OF CONTENT ON PERCEIVED AFFECT OF SUPER BOWL  
COMMERCIALS

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# THE EFFECT OF CONTENT ON PERCEIVED AFFECT OF SUPER BOWL COMMERCIALS

## Abstract

Although content analysis has been widely used to study advertising across a number of different communication situations, rarely is the content of advertisements connected to the effect they have on consumers. Super Bowl commercials in particular have not attracted a great deal of attention from researchers, and not much is known about their content or the impact these commercials have on consumers. Our study explores the content of commercials shown during the 1996-2002 Super Bowls and uses *USA Today* Ad Meter scores as a dependent variable. The findings suggest that in Super Bowl commercials higher levels of affect are associated with advertising goods rather than services, using emotional appeals, avoiding straight announcements as a message format, including animals, and not making quality claims. Our results also indicate that the most favorably rated advertisements in the sample differ from the lowest rated advertisements along a number of dimensions.

## Introduction

In the early days of television, it was not uncommon for a large portion of the American population to stop and watch a particular show on television. Programs like *I Love Lucy*, *Texaco Star Theater*, *Arthur Godfrey's Talent Scouts*, and *Dragnet* all had Nielsen ratings over 50 during the early 1950's (Brooks & Marsh, 1995). With the advent of cable television and the proliferation of cable stations that began in the 1970's, consumers had more choices and "media fragmentation" became commonplace as viewers fanned out across the programming spectrum. Today, it is not unusual for cable companies to offer between 70 and 100 different stations to their subscribers, which means that only rarely do a significant proportion of people in this culture stop and watch the same programming at the same time. As an example of this media fragmentation, the all-time highest rated show for a season is *I Love Lucy* during the 1952-1953 season with a Nielsen rating of 67.3, but in the 1994-1995 season a popular show like *Seinfeld* only generated a rating of 20.6 (Brooks & Marsh, 1995).

A notable exception to this fragmentation trend is the Super Bowl. During the period from 1996 through 2002 the Super Bowl telecast for that year was the highest rated single program each year ("Top 100," 2000; "Super Ratings," 2002). In 1996 the Super Bowl had a rating of 46, 43.3 in 1997, 44.5 in 1998, 40.2 in 1999, and in 2000 ratings rebounded to 43.3 ("Top 100," 2000). Since 1972, the Super Bowl has generated ratings in excess of 40% of U.S. households, with the lone exception of 1990 when the telecast generated a 39 rating (Linnet & Friedman, 2001; "Ratings Even," 2002).

One of the most interesting aspects of this phenomenon is that the commercials shown during the Super Bowl have also emerged as "must watch" TV as well. During the weeks preceding the game, there is a lot of media interest in the commercials, making the advertisements that run during the telecast a key aspect of the viewing spectacle. Interestingly, research has shown that about 4% of all Super Bowl viewers watch the game just to see the commercials (Elliot, 1997). Because of the relatively high ratings for the game and the high visibility of the commercials, Super Bowl advertising prices are usually the highest of the year.

Neil Pilson, president of Pilson Communications and a former president of CBS Sports, believes this long-term upward spiral of the cost for 30 seconds of ad time during the Super Bowl is likely to continue. Pilson notes that as the number of cable and satellite channels continues to proliferate, the value of premier sporting events will increase since these programs will continue to have big ratings while viewer shares for other properties decrease as the population fragments across the available channels (Pilson, 2001). This stable ratings base in the face of declining ratings for other properties will make sports even more valuable to advertisers in the coming years (Pilson, 2001).

Even though Super Bowl advertisements are among the most expensive commercials shown on television, only a handful of articles have studied how consumers perceive them. Even less is known about the strategies advertisers use when determining the content of these advertisements. Although there are probably a number of reasons why these advertisements receive so little attention from researchers, one factor may be that the Super Bowl only occurs once a year and affects a relatively small number of advertisers. However, because of the prominence of these messages and because many Super Bowl advertisers recognize that this platform requires their very best efforts, more focus on these advertisements by marketing and sport researchers is warranted.

Content analysis is one research method that can be used to study advertising and even though content analysis studies are fairly common in the advertising and marketing literature (e.g., Abernathy & Franke, 1996), the message content of Super Bowl commercials has not been the focus of any large-scale studies. We also do not know whether particular aspects of advertising content, sometimes called advertising execution factors (Stewart & Furse, 2000; Stewart & Koslow, 1989), are related to outcomes associated with these advertisements. However, Super Bowl advertisements are unique in that on the Monday following the Super Bowl the *USA Today* publishes Ad Meter data measuring affect for each Super Bowl advertisement run.

The purpose of this study is to analyze the content of the national advertisements telecast during the Super Bowl during a seven-year period from 1996-2002. In addition, we are also interested in determining whether particular content or advertising execution variables are significantly related to Ad Meter scores. This study extends the typical advertising content analysis study by pairing the descriptive content analysis data with a measure of affect, something that has not been done previously in this literature stream. Managers and researchers might use the findings as a standard of comparison to assess the affect consumers have for television commercials.

### Affective Responses To Advertising

Advertising and communication effectiveness is one of the most common topics in the marketing and advertising literature (Stewart, Pechmann, Ratneshwar, Stroud & Bryant, 1985). Approaches to measuring the persuasiveness of advertising have varied over the years as advertising paradigms have changed (Leckenby & Stout, 1985). In addition, alternatives for measuring advertising effectiveness are dependent upon the particular goals that a marketer has for an advertisement. Theories and approaches to measuring the effectiveness of advertisements are almost endless, possibly because the cost of advertising is so high. In 1998, advertising costs were estimated at \$201 billion in the United States alone (Peter & Olson, 2002).

Measuring the affect consumers have for an advertisement is one of the many measures of advertising effectiveness that has become common in recent years. Affect is associated with the tripartite model of attitudes that postulates that an attitude is comprised of cognitive, affective and behavioral components (Rosenberg, Hovland, McGuire, Abelson & Brehm, 1960). The cognitive component is associated with a consumer's beliefs about an object, the affective component is composed of the feelings or emotional responses to an object, and the behavioral component is represented by one's tendency to respond in some manner to an object or activity. Bagozzi (1978) reported evidence of construct validity for each of these three attitude components in the consumer context.

Affect is also seen as a mediator of advertising effects. Holbrook and Batra (1987) conceptualized a hierarchy of effects from advertising content to emotional responses, to attitude toward the ad, to attitude toward the brand. As a result, affect has been measured several ways including attitude toward the ad itself, and attitude toward the product advertised (Stewart et. al., 1985). The two concepts are related in that research has shown that attitude toward the ad does affect brand attitude (Madden, Debevec & Twible, 1985). Although some might criticize the use of affect producing advertising strategies, such as Pepsi's use of dancing bears to spell out Pepsi in a Super Bowl advertisement; Kim, Lim and Bhargava (1998) cite that particular commercial as an advertisement where affect for the ad transfers to affect for the brand.

The context in which advertisements are viewed mediates how consumers respond to an advertisement and makes the study of affect toward Super Bowl commercials an important issue to focus on. Prior research based on the mood congruency/accessibility hypothesis (Isen, Clark, Shalke & Karp, 1978; Bower, 1981; Clark, 1982) suggests that TV commercials should mirror the tone of the programming in which they appear. For example, when viewers watch a happy-go-lucky and frivolous program, advertisements that are also happy-go-lucky and frivolous are seen as fitting and consistent (Goldberg & Gorn, 1987).

Many viewers watch sporting events, particularly a mega-event like the Super Bowl, for the pure enjoyment associated with the event and for the emotional reactions that the game generates. Beasley, Shank and Ball (1998) noted that many advertisements during the game use the setting of a party as an attempt to mirror the party-like atmosphere associated with viewing the Super Bowl.

The Super Bowl is not programming that consumers typically watch for serious information. Instead, consumers watch this game expecting to have affective and emotional reactions during the contest. Newell, Henderson and Wu (2001) noted that the Super Bowl elicits a broad range of emotional reactions from viewers and simultaneously affects the pleasure and arousal experienced by viewers.

In a study of recall of Super Bowl advertisements Newell, Henderson and Wu (2001) found that enhanced arousal did have a positive and significant effect on ad recall. The unique party-like, high arousal context provided by the Super Bowl has a unique effect on the advertisements shown during this game. In addition, since the Super Bowl itself often produces high levels of affect, it might be argued that commercials shown during the game should also be designed to induce affect since this type of advertisement would be more consistent with the Super Bowl programming (Goldberg & Gorn, 1987). Based on the research noted above, it would seem that affect is a response measure that is particularly important and meaningful within the context of Super Bowl advertising.

## Method

### *Content Analysis Methods*

Content analysis methods focus on the message itself rather than the sender or receiver by using an objective, systematic and quantitative approach to analyze the information contained in a message (Kassarjian, 1977). This method for studying messages was first introduced into consumer research by Resnik and Stern (1977) and Kassarjian (1977). Since then, this technique has been widely used in a number of different marketing contexts and is particularly popular with advertising researchers. As evidence of the pervasiveness of the content analysis technique in advertising research, Abernathy and Franke (1996) conducted a meta-analysis of advertising content analysis studies published between 1977 and 1995 and identified 59 published studies utilizing content analysis methods.

The popularity of this technique does not appear to be waning as more recent articles have used the technique in a wide variety of advertising and marketing situations. For example, recent studies have investigated the content of business-to-business and consumer services advertisements in magazines (Turley & Kelley, 1997), the portrayal of Asian-Americans in television commercials (Taylor & Stern, 1997), international service advertising (Albers-Miller & Stafford, 1999), gender stereotyping in children's television commercials in the United States and Australia (Browne, 1998), television commercials on children's shows from the 1950's

(Alexander, Benjamin, Hoerrner & Rose, 1998), gender portrayals in Japanese magazine advertising (Ford, Voli, Honeycutt & Casey, 1998), television advertising during the NCAA Final Four college basketball games (Wyatt, McCullough & Wolgemuth, 1998), guilt appeals in magazine advertisements (Huhman & Brotherton, 1997), the images of girls in American and Japanese magazines (Maynard & Taylor, 1999), magazine advertisements from the United States and Arabic countries (Al-Olayan & Kirande, 2000), and children's television advertisements from China and the United States (Ji & McNeal, 2001).

A key point regarding content analysis is that the technique does not measure the effectiveness of a message or whether what was intended to be communicated by the advertiser, was actually perceived by the audience (Kassarjian, 1977). However, in an effort to move beyond the typically descriptive nature of content analysis there have been at least three attempts to use content analysis along with various outcome measures of consumer perceptions.

For example, in a study of business-to-business print advertisements, Naccarato and Neuendorf (1998) were interested in the effect of advertising form and content on readership, recall and perceptions of the ad. Their findings indicate that readership, aided recall and advertising evaluations are independent processes and that different advertising elements contributed to each of these outcomes (Naccarato & Neuendorf, 1998). This study shows it is possible to predict particular consumer outcomes or reactions to an advertisement based on how the advertisement is structured.

In another content analysis study incorporating dependent measures, Stewart and Furse (1986) content analyzed 1,059 television commercials using a 151-item instrument to gauge the effect that commercial content had on recall, comprehension and persuasiveness. Their findings indicate that the single most important executional determinant of persuasion and recall is a brand-differentiating message. At higher levels of recall the brand-differentiating message explained twice the variance accounted for at lower levels of recall (Stewart & Furse, 1986). Finally, in a third study employing outcome measures Gagnard and Morris (1988) studied 121 CLIO award-winning commercials from 1975, 1980 and 1985 using most of Stewart and Furse's

151-item coding scheme, and found that CLIO advertisements tended not to have this brand-differentiating message. Gagnard and Morris (1988) wondered whether these award-winning advertisements might actually be effective but did not measure or test for advertising effectiveness in their study.

### *Sample*

National advertisements appearing during Super Bowl games from the years 1996-2002 were included in the sample for this study. These years were chosen because they represent several years of increasing advertising prices followed by a “soft market” for Super Bowl commercials. In 2000, a strong year, ABC charged an average of \$2.1 million for a 30-second spot during the actual game (Linnet & Friedman, 2001). The next year Super Bowl advertising prices remained relatively flat or even decreased slightly from the year before, primarily because of unsold spots a week before the game. However, in 2002 the average Super Bowl advertising rate dropped for the first time by an average of 9% per 30-second spot. These “soft” years can be attributed to changing economic circumstances and competition for sports-related advertisers with the Olympics in 2002 (“Shrunken Budgets,” 2002).

Commercials that appeared in the pre-game show, the post-game show, and during halftime were not included in the sample for this study. These advertisements are not a part of the *USA Today* Ad Meter analysis. Similarly, local or spot advertisements shown during the game were also not included in this study since these advertisements also do not receive Ad Meter scores.

Ad Meter data are gathered from a group of adult volunteers recruited by an outside polling firm representing the *USA Today*. The participants are recruited with the specific intent of generating a group of Ad Meter participants representative of the Super Bowl viewing audience. Participants are given a hand-held meter on which to register their moment-by-moment affect for each national advertisement shown during the game. Affect can be defined as the emotional component of an attitude and can be measured by how much respondents like or dislike a commercial (Kim, Lim & Bhargava, 1998). These moment-by-moment scores are

averaged for all respondents to get an overall affect score for each advertisement. The size of the respondent group has varied by year due to recruited participants not showing up to participate in the study for a variety of reasons. Based on reporting from the *USA Today* on the Monday after each Super Bowl the volunteer pools have had sample sizes of 60 in 1996, 139 in 1997, 185 in 1998, 150 in 1999, 273 in 2000, 119 in 2001, and 118 in 2002.

Our analysis considers 362 commercials shown during these years. The advertisers in this sample include well known advertisers and brands such as Pepsi, Coke, Seven Up, Budweiser, Nike, McDonald's, Toyota, Pizza Hut, Ford, Frito Lay, Master Card, Nissan, Honda, General Motors, Mitsubishi, MCI, Taco Bell, Visa, AT&T, Tommy Hilfiger, Victoria's Secret, Porsche, American Express, Volvo, M&M, BMW, Apple Computer, Monster.com , Tylenol, Federal Express, Subway and Philip Morris. However, the list of Super Bowl advertisers from these years also contains a number of lesser known advertisers and brands including the Pork Producers, Luxotica Eyewear, Janus, Auto-By-Tel, OurBeginning.com, Pets.com, Kforce.com, AutoTrader.com, OnMoney.com, Epidemic.com, LifeMinders.com, Immodium AD, Oracle, Network Associates, McIlhenny Tabasco, Qualcomm, Selsun Blue, Seibel Systems, First Union, Just for Feet, Nuveen, Netpliance, WebMD, MicroStrategy, The National Heart Savers Association, The American Legacy Foundation and advertisements for a wide variety of movies.

#### *Coding Procedures and Training*

Two MBA students participating in a summer research program were used as judges for these advertisements. Both of the judges had earned bachelors degrees in business administration and had taken courses in marketing and statistics.

In order to help ensure the reliability and objectivity of the judgments associated with the content analysis, the judge training procedures described by Kolbe and Burnett (1991) were employed in this study. Specifically, the following steps were taken: (1) Judges were given rules and procedures to use when coding advertisements; (2) Judges were trained by one of the authors prior to evaluating any advertisements; (3) Judges then independently evaluated a sample of pretest advertisements from a sporting event, followed with a discussion between the judges and

one of the authors of how variables should be categorized; (4) Judges' activities were independent and not guided by the authors while coding; and (5) Judges coded commercials independently of each other. Disagreements between the judges were resolved by having both judges review each disagreement and then jointly agree on the best classification.

### *Independent Variables*

Advertisements were classified on a number of different dimensions or advertising execution variables through the content analysis procedures. Initially, independent variables were chosen based on a review of the literature associated with advertising content analysis studies. Turley and Kelley's (1997) content analysis of service advertisements served as the initial model, and then variables were added to the variable list due to their potential to induce affect in respondents. Each of the affect-inducing variables was included in the study based on previous research. These variables included: music (e.g., Brunner, 1990), humor (e.g., Weinberger & Gulas, 1992) and children and animals (e.g., Vadehra, 1996).

For analysis purposes the variables were grouped into three categories. The descriptive variable group included 1) the year the commercial appeared, 2) the length of the commercial, and 3) the type of product advertised. Message related variables associated with these Super Bowl commercials were included in the second category of variables. They included: 1) message source, 2) message format, 3) appeal, 4) quality information, 5) web address, 6) price information, and 7) brand information in the form of slogan usage. Finally, several different aspects of commercials that many advertisers believe have the ability to directly induce affect in consumers were grouped together. Specifically, we investigated 1) the use of humor, 2) the use of sports themes, 3) the use of animals, 4) the use of children, and 5) the use of music.

Some of the variables classified through the content analysis procedures were dichotomous variables where the judges noted whether these techniques or features were used or not used in a particular commercial. These dichotomous variables included: humor, quality claims, slogans, Web address, sports theme, presence of children, and the presence of animals.

Other variables, such as appeal, included multiple categories and required judges to make more complex classificatory decisions. Appeals were defined as the approach advertisers take to communicate the need for a product, and were classified as being emotional or rational (Turley & Kelley, 1997). Emotional advertisements stressed concepts like adventure, fear, humor, romance, sensuousness/sex appeal, care for loved ones, guilt, play/contest, affiliation, self-worth, image, status or power. Advertisements were classified as rational appeals if they included notions of comfort, convenience, ease of use, economy, health, profitability, quality, reliability, time saving, efficiency, environmental friendliness, or compared the brand to other brands.

With message source, the issue becomes who is delivering the principle information in the ad. The source of the message is an important advertising decision since consumers tend to respond differently to the same message delivered by different sources (e.g., Gotlieb & Sarel, 1992). For example, Gotlieb and Sarel (1992) concluded that when a source is highly credible, consumers are less likely to discount the message. In addition to credibility, sources can influence the attention given to the ad and consumers' desire to emulate the spokesperson (Ohanian, 1990). The classifications of message sources used in this study included: corporate executive, celebrity endorsement, testimonial, unidentified announcer, jingles, actors in skits, trade-characters, and a classification for other approaches that included all other types of message sources.

Message format, sometimes called copy style, classifies the message based upon the way the message is organized and the context in which it appears. Although message formats can be divided into almost endless classifications, the message format classifications used in this study were straight announcements, demonstrations, testimonials, endorsements, slice-of-life, lifestyle, mini-dramas, musical formats, straight product presentations, animation, and other.

Price was classified based on the amount or nature of price information provided in the commercial. As noted by Mazumdar and Monroe (1990), price information can be encoded in two ways. An ad was coded as having an absolute price if an actual price was listed (e.g., \$14.99). An ad was classified as having relative price information if the ad communicated

information about the price or compared it to competition but did not mention an actual price (e.g., indicating lower price than competitors, percentage discounts, or a promise of value). Finally, advertisements were classified as having no price information if there was not a reference to price in the commercial.

*Dependent Variable*

Ad Meter scores, published annually after the Super Bowl by the *USA Today*, were employed as the dependent variable in our study. The Ad Meter scores are affect scores focusing on the individual's affect for a particular commercial. In an advertising context, affect is considered an intermediate stage in the movement from awareness to action or behavior (Belch & Belch, 2001; Lavidge & Steiner, 1961). In the hierarchy of effects model of advertising effectiveness, affect follows awareness and knowledge and precedes preference, conviction and purchase (Lavidge & Steiner, 1961). Therefore, Ad Meter scores do not predict or measure the effect that a particular commercial may have on brand sales or attitude change toward the brand. However, they do provide a measure of the likeability level of affect held for an advertisement.

Results

*Inter-Judge Reliability*

As a first step in the analysis of our data, inter-judge reliability was assessed through the calculation of the Ir coefficient developed by Perreault and Leigh (1989). The Ir value for each of the qualitative nominally scaled variables included in our study is provided in Table 1. The Ir values for the variables used in this study ranged from .77 for the slogan variable to .98 for the variables focusing on product type and price claims. The relatively high Ir coefficients associated with the variables included in this study are indicative of a high degree of inter-judge reliability for each of the variables encoded through our content analysis procedures.

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Insert Table 1 About Here  
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### *Year-to-Year Differences*

Prior to analyzing the data associated with the Super Bowl commercials from the years 1996 thru 2002, statistical tests were conducted in order to determine if there were significant differences between the advertisements across years. In order to do this, chi-square contingency tables were created using the year the Super Bowl advertisements appeared and the variables categorized through the content analysis process. The results of these chi-square tests, as shown in Table 2, indicated that there were several statistically significant differences in the Super Bowl advertisements over the seven-year period.

Specifically, the distribution of the types of products advertised in Super Bowl commercials was different across the years considered (chi-square = 29.97, 6 d.f.,  $p = .000$ ). During the years from 1996 to 2002 an increasing percentage of Super Bowl commercials were devoted to advertising services as opposed to goods. A second statistically significant difference involves the type of appeal used in the advertisement (chi-square= 22.74, 12 d.f,  $p = .030$ ). Emotional appeals increased over this seven-year period. Another variable that differed was price information (chi-square = 33.26, 12 d.f,  $p = .001$ ). The use of price information decreased over time to a point where price information is rarely provided in the later years of this study. Information associated with quality also decreased over this time period (chi-square = 16.04, 6 d.f,  $p = .014$ ). Another statistically significant difference in Super Bowl commercials across the years included in our study involved the use of slogans in the advertisements (chi-square = 31.77, 6 d.f.,  $p = .000$ ). During the years of interest in our study an increasing percentage of Super Bowl commercials included slogans in their content. Over the time period analyzed, the usage of foreground music, as well as commercials without music has slightly increased (chi-square 24.76, 12 d.f,  $p = .016$ ). Finally, as one might expect, moving from 1996 to 2002 a larger percentage of Super Bowl commercials included web addresses (chi-square = 100.96, 6 d.f.,  $p = .00$ ).

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Insert Table 2 About Here  
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Table 3 provides the frequency counts for each of the variables included in the content analysis, average Ad Meter scores for these groups, and the ANOVA results used to test for significant differences in Ad Meter scores for each group. Scheffe's post hoc comparison tests were used to further analyze the cell mean differences in situations where such an analysis was appropriate.

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Insert Table 3 About Here  
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### *Descriptive Characteristics*

Initially, we considered the relationship between Ad Meter scores and several different descriptive characteristics. There was a statistically significant difference in Ad Meter scores across years at the .05-level based on the results of the ANOVA ( $F = 3.30, p = .004$ ). Mean values of Ad Meter scores were lower in subsequent years than they were during the initial year (1996) considered in our analysis. However, the Scheffe post hoc test indicated only 1996 and 2001 have means that are statistically different.

Although 30 second spots are easily the most common in this sample, Super Bowl commercials have been produced in four different lengths over the past seven years: 15, 30, 45, and 60 seconds. ANOVA results were significant suggesting differences in the Ad Meter scores for varying lengths of commercials ( $F = 9.67, p = .00$ ). Furthermore, the Scheffe post hoc test identified a statistically significant difference in cell means between the 15-second spots and the 45 and 60 second spots. In addition, the 30-second spots generated significantly lower affect ratings than the advertisements that ran for a full minute. Significant differences were also identified in Ad Meter scores based on the type of product being advertised. Specifically,

commercials advertising goods (mean = 6.85) were rated more favorably than commercials advertising services (mean = 6.19) ( $F = 36.58, p = .00$ ).

### *Message Variables*

There were significant differences in the Ad Meter scores across different message sources ( $F = 12.58, p = .00$ ). Specifically, commercials using corporate executives (mean = 5.75), testimonials (mean = 5.83), jingles (mean = 5.98), and unidentified announcers (mean = 6.04) were rated significantly lower than advertisements classified in our trade character category (mean = 7.45). Examples of message sources classified as “trade characters” include Anheuser Busch’s talking frogs, the Budweiser Clydesdale horses, and the animated m&m candies.

Significant differences in Ad Meter scores were also identified across different message formats ( $F = 9.01, p = .00$ ). In this case, commercials using a straight announcement format (mean = 5.44) were rated significantly lower than those using slice of life (mean = 6.92) and mini-drama formats (mean = 7.02). Similarly, different types of appeals yielded significantly different affect scores ( $F = 49.87, p = .00$ ). The ANOVA results indicated that advertisements using emotional appeals (mean = 6.73) had significantly higher Ad Meter scores than advertisements using rational appeals (mean = 5.83).

The evaluation of Ad Meter scores based on the availability of quality information indicated that Super Bowl commercials including direct quality claims were rated less favorably (mean = 6.07) than those without quality claims (mean = 6.65) ( $F = 18.01, p = .00$ ). In addition, our findings indicated that commercials including web addresses (mean = 6.26) were rated significantly lower than commercials without web addresses (mean = 6.76) ( $F = 20.01, p = .00$ ). There also were significant statistical differences in Ad Meter scores based on the availability of price information. Advertisements containing relative price information (mean = 5.04) were rated significantly lower than advertisements without price information (mean = 6.56) ( $F = 6.73, p = .001$ ). Finally, our findings indicated that commercials without slogans (mean = 6.34) were rated significantly lower than commercials with slogans (mean = 6.65) ( $F = 6.44, p = .012$ ).

*Affect Inducing Variables*

Commercials including humor (mean = 6.91) were rated more favorably than those without (mean = 5.77) ( $F = 121.16, p = .00$ ). Similarly, Super Bowl commercials containing animals were rated significantly higher (mean = 7.09) than those without animals (mean = 6.29) ( $F = 47.73, p = .00$ ). The use of sports themes ( $F = 3.37, p = .067$ ), the inclusion or exclusion of children ( $F = .215, p = .64$ ), and the use of different types of music in Super Bowl commercials ( $F = .246, p = .782$ ) were all not significantly related to Ad Meter scores.

*Comparing the Best and the Worst Advertisements in the Sample*

In order to further analyze the data a subset of the total data set was analyzed. The specific research question of interest was whether advertisements with relatively high Ad Meter scores were significantly different from advertisements that generated lower Ad Meter scores. The top and bottom ten rated advertisements from each of the years 1996 through 2002 yielded a sample of 140 advertisements. Top ten and bottom ten advertisements from each year were analyzed in order to account for potential differences in rating patterns among the different panels of raters used by the *USA Today* over the 7-year period. These results are displayed in Table 4.

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Insert Table 4 About Here  
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Several significant differences between the “best” and the “worst” advertisements in the sample were revealed through these analyses. For example, the type of product being promoted in the Super Bowl advertisements was significantly related to ad ranking (chi-square = 17.14,  $p = .000$ ). Only sixteen of the top 70 Super Bowl advertisements promoted services. On the other hand, 44 of the bottom 70 advertisements promoted services. Message source was significantly

related to ad ranking (chi-square = 50.39,  $p = .000$ ). Analysis of these advertisements indicated that 38 of the 70 bottom ranked advertisements used unidentified announcers, while only 5 of the 70 top ranked advertisements used this format. Message format was significantly related to ad ranking (chi-square = 54.36,  $p = .000$ ). Further analysis of these advertisements showed that the top 70 ranked advertisements did not include any straight announcements, product presentation or testimonial formats, but animation was used 33 times. The bottom 70 advertisements used a variety of message formats with the formats of lifestyle and product presentation accounting for 34 of the 70 advertisements (16 and 18 advertisements, respectively).

The type of appeal used in these Super Bowl advertisements was also significantly related to ad ranking (chi-square = 43.54,  $p = .000$ ). All but two of the top 70 ranked advertisements used emotional appeals. Among bottom 70 ranked advertisements however, 33 used emotional appeals and 37 used rational appeals. The inclusion of quality claims was also significantly related to the Super Bowl ad ranking (chi-square = 16.80,  $p = .000$ ). Only seven of the top 70 ranked advertisements included quality claims; while 29 of the bottom 70 ranked advertisements included claims of this type. Including a web address in Super Bowl commercials was also significantly related to the ad ranking (chi-square = 9.54,  $p = .002$ ). Twenty of the top 70 ranked advertisements included web addresses. The bottom 70 ranked advertisements included 42 advertisements with web addresses. The use of price information in the Super Bowl advertisements was significantly related to ad ranking (chi-square = 7.37,  $p = .025$ ). Interestingly, the inclusion of price information was relatively rare in both top and bottom ranked advertisements. None of the top ranked advertisements and only seven of the bottom ranked advertisements included any sort of price information.

Humor is also significantly related to affect scores (chi-square = 66.32,  $p = .000$ ). Every one of the top 70 ranked advertisements included humor in their messages, however only 27 of the bottom 70 ranked advertisements used humor. Finally, the chi-square statistic for the comparison between ad ranking and animals was statistically significant (chi-square = 35.96,  $p =$

000). The results of the cross tabulation indicated that 42 of the top 70 ranked advertisements included animals; while only nine of the bottom 70 ranked advertisements included animals.

There were also a number of comparisons between the best and worst advertisements in the sample that were not significantly different. Specifically, the use of slogans (chi-square = .3.62,  $p = .057$ ), the use of sports themes (chi-square = 2.35,  $p = .125$ ), the inclusion of children (chi-square = .504,  $p = .48$ ) and the use of music (chi-square = .389,  $p = .823$ ) were all not significantly related to Super Bowl advertisement ranking.

### Discussion and Implications

This research extends the content analysis of advertisements literature stream into another context by connecting content with advertising affect. The intent of our research was to use the Super Bowl context to study the relationship between commonly used television advertising execution variables and perceived affect. Based upon the results discussed in the previous section, there does appear to be a relationship between how an ad is designed and implemented, and how much affect it generates among viewers. However, our findings also indicate that certain execution variables that many in the advertising community commonly believe to be associated with generating affect did not do so in this context.

For example, a commonly described “rule” in advertising circles is that a sure way to create affect is to include animals, children, music and/or humor in an advertisement. In this study we found a significant relationship between animals and humor and affect, but did not find this same relationship for children and music.

In addition we also found that certain message strategies and message formats are significantly more effective in inducing affect than others. Based on our findings, Super Bowl advertisers intent on producing positive affect for their commercials should avoid using corporate executives, testimonials, jingles and unidentified announcers as message sources but should develop and use trade characters when possible. Similarly, the use of straight announcements as a message format is a significantly worse option than using mini-dramas in Super Bowl commercials when producing positive affect is the advertising objective.

Super Bowl advertising appeals should be chosen with particular care. Our results indicate it is difficult to create an ad that uses a rational appeal and generates high levels of positive affect (see Table 3). Gardner's (1994) study of the context in which advertisements appear offers an explanation for this finding. Her findings indicated that informational advertisements are more effective in a negative mood-inducing context, and emotional advertisements in a positive mood-inducing context. Since watching the Super Bowl is a festive occasion for many viewers that generates positive moods, emotional appeals would be more likely to generate positive affect in those watching the advertisements.

The problem with using rational appeals in this context becomes increasingly obvious when the appeal choices of the "best" and "worst" advertisements are examined. Only two (2.8%) of the advertisements in the "best" group used a rational appeal, while 56% of the "worst" category included advertisements using this type of appeal. In our entire sample, there were 82 advertisements that used rational appeals and 39 of them (48%) were classified as being among the worst advertisements in the study. Based on these results, managers should not expect high levels of affect when using rational appeals and should probably avoid them when affect is a goal.

Another interesting finding associated with this study concerns the way product type is related to affect. Our findings indicated that while the number of services advertisements accounted for an increasingly larger percentage of the total advertisements per year through the seven years of our sample, they generate significantly lower levels of affect. In addition, relatively few advertisements for services stand out as being among the best in the sample. Even though service advertisements account for almost 50% of the total sample, they only account for about 28% of the "best" advertisements. The bottom set, however is dominated by advertisements for services, as these commercials account for almost 63% of those in the "worst" category.

Services theorists have noted for over 20 years that when compared to goods, the intangibility of services makes them harder to effectively advertise (Shostack, 1977; Zeithaml,

1981). Mittal (1999) argues that services advertisers can overcome these issues by choosing appropriate message strategies. Our findings suggest that service firms and advertising agencies are still struggling to find effective advertising approaches, at least when it comes to generating affect. The relative inability to generate high levels of affect for services commercials in this study is particularly interesting since Super Bowl commercials tend to have larger than normal production budgets, and are often directed by the best in the industry (Horovitz, 1998). With relatively high budgets available and the talent used to develop and produce these commercials, one would expect these differences between goods and services to be minimized.

Based upon the affect scores generated by Ad Meter respondents, there are large numbers of Super Bowl advertisements that should not be using this game as a media vehicle. As an example, advertisements associated with new product launches may not be particularly effective in this context since these advertisements must often convey some “hard” information about the brand. In a similar vein, existing products that have not been able to build awareness and communicate basic product knowledge may not be good candidates for purchasing Super Bowl time. Unless these messages can be packaged in a creative way, advertisements with these goals should be shown at other times when viewers are in a different frame of mind.

The findings for this study may have some generalizability beyond the Super Bowl setting. Specifically, generating affect is often a goal for advertisers at other times and our results provide some insight into advertising strategies that generate positive feelings from consumers.

### Limitations

This study was based on a content analysis of Super Bowl commercials for the years 1996 through 2002. This seven-year period saw a continued growth and proliferation of the Super Bowl as a sporting event and as a premier broadcasting entertainment event that transcends sports. The primary outcome variable considered in this study was the Ad Meter score that is computed annually during the Super Bowl and is published by the *USA Today*. This measure is strictly a measure of affect that consumers on this panel hold for the commercials in

question. While there are many possible objectives associated with advertising, ultimately at some level a positive return on investment is sought. Most likely, this relates to an increase in sales. The hierarchy of effects model of advertising effectiveness suggests that consumers follow a path from awareness, to knowledge, to affect, to preference, to conviction, to purchase (Lavidge & Steiner, 1961). While it is impossible to provide a meaningful measure of increased sales associated with Super Bowl advertising within our data set, the *USA Today* Ad Meter scores linked to the content of individual advertisements do tap into one of the key links in the hierarchy of effects model which culminates in purchase (i.e., sales).

A major limitation associated with using Ad Meter scores is that details of the selection, demographic make-up and training of the Ad Meter judges is not reported in the media. In addition, the number of judges varies from year to year. However, as noted earlier, within the advertising industry, the *USA Today* ad meter scores is a primary and accepted method for tracking winners and losers for the advertising that accompanies the Super Bowl. For the purposes of this study, the Ad Meter data are secondary data. As a result, the procedures for collecting the Ad Meter data are outside the control of the authors of this study. However, it should be noted that the use of secondary data in academic research is common and generally accepted.

A limitation to the generalizability of the data from this study is associated with the Super Bowl as a message context. Although advertisers often try to generate affect as a goal, other contexts may not produce the same emotional and affect intensity that is provided by the Super Bowl. The Super Bowl is a unique event in American culture and whether the game provides an “umbrella effect” for the advertisements is not presently known.

#### Future Research

A principle contribution associated with this study is the linkage between advertising content and consumer perceptions of an advertisement. Although affect is only one perception or response to an advertisement, it is a measure that is recognized as being an important mediator in the effect an advertisement has on consumers. However, future researchers should address the

degree to which the Super Bowl provides an affective context and influences the way advertisements are perceived by viewers. Would these same advertisements be perceived differently if they appeared in other contexts? Although we know context is important, and we know the Super Bowl does provide a unique context, we do not know how much that context accounts for the affect associated with these advertisements.

Future researchers focusing on the Super Bowl commercial phenomenon may want to consider incorporating other advertising response measures such as purchase intentions, sales, and attitude toward the brand. Including outcome measures like these will provide researchers and practitioners with a broader based understanding of how Super Bowl commercials influence consumers.

In the future, researchers might also employ similar methodologies to investigate advertising practices associated with other premier sporting events such as the Olympics, the NCAA Final Four, or the Bowl Championship Series (BCS) game between the top two NCAA football teams. Although these are all major sporting events as is the Super Bowl, one might argue that the Super Bowl holds the added attraction of being an entertainment event in and of itself, which probably is not true of these other events.

Researchers with an international focus might also consider studying advertising associated with the World Cup. Studying the advertisements associated with games shown across different cultures might provide some interesting insights into culture and the meaning that sport plays across cultures.

The nature of sports in America has changed very dramatically over the last several decades. For better or for worse, television has changed the way consumers interact with sports and sporting events, and the way sports executives deliver their games and events to consumers. Since advertising sales is usually the principle driver behind the decision to televise an athletic contest or to purchase broadcasting rights to a sporting event, how consumers view and perceive advertisements during sporting events and what advertising features produce effective messages

is a topic that deserves more attention from advertising, sports and marketing researchers in future studies.

Table 1

## Ir Coefficients

Variable	# Of Disagreements	Ir
Service/Good	6	.983
Appeal	84	.807
Humor	35	.898
Message Source	83	.859
Message Format	113	.769
Length	Objective Measure	N/A
Price	11	.977
Quality	57	.828
Slogan	75	.765
Music	79	.820
Web	23	.934
Sports Theme	17	.952
Children	13	.963
Animals	26	.925

Table 2

## Year By Content Variable Statistical Differences

Year x Product Type Cross Tabulation				
		Product Type		
Year		Service	Good	Total
	1996	13	34	47
	1997	17	32	49
	1998	20	32	52
	1999	25	27	52
	2000	32	19	51
	2001	35	20	55
	2002	37	19	56
Total		179	183	362

Chi-square = 29.97, 6 d.f., p = .000

Year x Appeal Usage Cross Tabulation				
		Appeal Usage		
Year		Emotional	Rational	Total
	1996	27	20	47
	1997	36	13	49
	1998	44	8	52
	1999	38	14	52
	2000	44	7	51
	2001	45	10	55
	2002	46	10	56
Total		280	82	362

Chi-square = 16.84 6 d.f., p = .010

Table 2 (cont.)

		Year x Price Usage Cross Tabulation			
		Price Usage			
Year		Absolute Price	Relative Price	No Price	Total
	1996	5	1	41	47
	1997	1	0	48	49
	1998	1	0	51	52
	1999	1	0	51	52
	2000	0	0	51	51
	2001	0	4	51	55
	2002	0	1	55	56
Total		8	6	348	362

Chi-square = 33.26 12 d.f., p = .001

		Year x Quality Usage Cross Tabulation		
		Quality Usage		
Year		Quality	No Quality	Total
	1996	18	29	47
	1997	15	34	49
	1998	7	45	52
	1999	11	41	52
	2000	6	45	51
	2001	10	45	55
	2002	10	46	56
Total		77	285	362

Chi-square = 16.04 6.d.f., p = .014

		Year x Slogan Usage Cross Tabulation		
		Slogan Usage		
Year		Slogan	No Slogan	Total
	1996	36	11	47
	1997	26	23	49
	1998	18	34	52
	1999	19	33	52
	2000	28	23	51
	2001	39	16	55
	2002	35	21	56
Total		201	161	362

Chi-square = 31.77, 6 d.f., p = .000

Table 2 (cont.)

Year x Music Usage Cross Tabulation					
Year		Music Usage			Total
		Background	Foreground	No Music	
	1996	36	8	3	47
	1997	38	10	1	49
	1998	34	12	6	52
	1999	35	12	5	52
	2000	34	12	5	51
	2001	28	16	11	55
	2002	31	10	15	56
Total		236	80	46	362

Chi-square = 24.76 12 d.f., p = .016

Year x Web Address Usage Cross tabulation				
Year		Web Address Usage		Total
		Address	No Address	
	1996	2	45	47
	1997	8	41	49
	1998	14	38	52
	1999	29	23	52
	2000	38	13	51
	2001	36	19	55
	2002	41	15	56
Total		168	194	362

Chi-square = 100.96, 6 d.f., p = .000

Table 3

## ANOVA Results for Descriptive Variables on Ad Meter Scores

Variable Categories	Frequency	Percent	Ad Meter Score <sup>*</sup>	F-Value
<b>Descriptive Variables</b>				
<u>Year</u>				
1996	47	13%	6.92 <sup>a</sup>	3.30 (p=.004)
1997	49	13.5%	6.40 <sup>ab</sup>	
1998	52	14.4%	6.70 <sup>ab</sup>	
1999	52	14.4%	6.51 <sup>ab</sup>	
2000	51	14.1%	6.38 <sup>ab</sup>	
2001	55	15.2%	6.10 <sup>b</sup>	
2002	56	15.5%	6.69 <sup>ab</sup>	
TOTAL	362	100%		
<u>Ad Length</u>				
15 Seconds	20	5.5%	6.15 <sup>a</sup>	9.67 (p=.00)
30 Seconds	280	77.3%	6.41 <sup>ab</sup>	
45 Seconds	55	15.2%	7.12 <sup>bc</sup>	
60 Seconds	7	1.9%	7.41 <sup>c</sup>	
<u>Product Type</u>				
Service	179	49.4%	6.19	36.58 (p=.00)
Good	183	50.6%	6.85	
<b>Message Variables</b>				
<u>Message Source</u>				
Corporate Executive	5	1.4%	5.75 <sup>a</sup>	12.58 (p=.00)
Endorsement	15	4.1%	7.11 <sup>ab</sup>	
Testimonial	16	4.4%	5.83 <sup>a</sup>	
Unidentified Announcer	123	34%	6.04 <sup>a</sup>	
Jingle	7	1.9%	5.98 <sup>a</sup>	
Actors in Skits	152	42%	6.83 <sup>ab</sup>	
Trade Characters	26	7.2%	7.45 <sup>b</sup>	
Other	18	5%	6.41 <sup>ab</sup>	
<u>Message Format</u>				
Straight Announcement	10	2.8%	5.44 <sup>a</sup>	9.01 (p=.00)
Demonstration	6	1.7%	6.03 <sup>ab</sup>	
Testimonial	9	2.5%	5.56 <sup>ab</sup>	
Endorsement	23	6.4%	6.70 <sup>ab</sup>	
Slice of Life	79	21.8%	6.92 <sup>b</sup>	
Lifestyle	55	15.2%	6.30 <sup>ab</sup>	
Mini-Drama	17	4.7%	7.02 <sup>b</sup>	
Musical	8	2.2%	5.87 <sup>ab</sup>	
Product Presentation	64	17.7%	5.95 <sup>ab</sup>	
Animation	91	25.1%	6.89 <sup>ab</sup>	

Table 3 (cont.)

Variable Categories	Frequency	Percent	Ad Meter Score <sup>*</sup>	F-Value
<u>Appeal</u>				
Emotional Appeal	280	77.3%	6.73	49.87
Rational Appeal	82	22.7%	5.83	(p=.00)
<u>Quality Claims</u>				
Direct Quality Claims	77	21.3%	6.07	18.01
No Quality Claims	285	78.7%	6.65	(p=.00)
<u>Web Address</u>				
Web Address	168	46.5%	6.26	20.01
No Web Address	194	53.5%	6.76	(p=.00)
<u>Price Information</u>				
Absolute Price	8	2.2%	6.09 <sup>ab</sup>	6.73
Relative Price	6	1.7%	5.04 <sup>a</sup>	(p=.001)
No Price	348	96.1%	6.56 <sup>b</sup>	
<u>Slogan</u>				
Slogan	201	55.4%	6.65	6.44
No Slogan	161	44.6%	6.37	(p=.012)
<u>Affective Variables</u>				
<u>Humor</u>				
Humor	239	66%	6.91	121.16
No Humor	123	34%	5.77	(p=.00)
<u>Sports Theme</u>				
Sports Theme	48	13.3%	6.79	3.37
No Sports Theme	314	86.7%	6.49	(p=.067)
<u>Animals</u>				
Animals	106	29.3%	7.09	47.73
No Animals	256	70.7%	6.29	(p=.00)
<u>Children</u>				
Children	70	19.3%	6.58	.215
No Children	292	80.7%	6.51	(p=.643)
<u>Music</u>				
Background Music	236	65.2%	6.54	.246
Foreground Music	80	22.1%	6.54	(p=.782)
No Music	46	12.7%	6.42	

\* Significantly different ad meter score means are denoted through superscripts. Means with different superscripts are significantly different based on a Scheffe test with a p value less than or equal to .05.

Table 4

## Best and Worst Advertisement Analysis

Variable Categories	Best Ad Frequency (%)	Worst Ad Frequency (%)	Chi- Square	p-value
<b>Descriptive Variables</b>				
<b>Ad Length</b>				
15 Seconds	3 (33.3%)	6 (66.7%)	16.51 (3 d.f.)	.00
30 Seconds	43 (42.2%)	59 (57.8%)		
45 Seconds	20 (80.0%)	5 (20.0%)		
60 Seconds	4 (100%)	0 (0.0%)		
<b>Product Type</b>				
Service	16 (28.6%)	40 (71.4%)	17.14 (1 d.f.)	.00
Good	54 (64.3%)	30 (35.7%)		
<b>Message Variables</b>				
<b>Message Source</b>				
Corporate Executive	1 (20.0%)	4 (80.0%)	50.39 (7 d.f.)	.00
Endorsement	4 (100%)	0 (0.0%)		
Testimonial	1 (11.1%)	8 (88.9%)		
Unidentified Announcer	5 (13.2%)	33 (86.8%)		
Jingle	1 (33.3%)	2 (66.7%)		
Actors in Skits	41 (67.2%)	20 (32.8%)		
Trade Characters	13 (92.9%)	1 (7.1%)		
Other	4 (66.7%)	2 (33.3%)		
<b>Message Format</b>				
Straight Announcement	0 (0.0%)	5 (100%)	54.36 (9 d.f.)	.00
Demonstration	1 (50.0%)	1 (50.0%)		
Testimonial	0 (0.0%)	6 (100%)		
Endorsement	5 (55.6%)	4 (44.4%)		
Slice of Life	18 (81.8%)	4 (18.2%)		
Lifestyle	4 (21.1%)	15 (78.9%)		
Mini-Drama	8 (72.7%)	3 (27.3%)		
Musical	1 (25.0%)	3 (75.0%)		
Product Presentation	0 (0.0%)	16 (100%)		
Animation	33 (71.7%)	13 (28.3%)		
<b>Appeal</b>				
Emotional Appeal	68 (67.3%)	33 (32.7%)	43.54 (1 d.f.)	.00
Rational Appeal	2 (5.1%)	37 (94.9%)		
<b>Quality Claims</b>				
Direct Quality Claims	7 (20.0%)	28 (80.0%)	16.80 (1 d.f.)	.00
No Quality Claims	63 (60.0%)	42 (40.0%)		

Table 4 (cont.)

Variable Categories	Best Ad Frequency (%)	Worst Ad Frequency (%)	Chi- Square	p-value
<u>Web Address</u>				
Web Address	20 (34.5%)	38 (65.5%)	9.54	.00
No Web Address	50 (61.0%)	32 (39.0%)	(1 d.f.)	
<u>Price Information</u>				
Absolute Price Information	0 (0.0%)	3 (100%)	7.37	.03
Relative Price Information	0 (0.0%)	4 (100%)	(2 d.f.)	
No Price Information	70 (52.6%)	63 (47.4%)		
<u>Slogan</u>				
Slogan	48 (56.5%)	37 (43.5%)	3.62	.06
No Slogan	22 (40.0%)	33 (60.0%)	(1 d.f.)	
<u>Affective Variables</u>				
<u>Humor</u>				
Humor	70 (73.7%)	25 (26.3%)	66.32	.00
No Humor	0 (0.0%)	45 (100%)	(1 d.f.)	
<u>Sports Theme</u>				
Sports Theme	11 (68.8%)	5 (31.3%)	2.54	.11
No Sports Theme	59 (47.6%)	65 (52.4%)	(1 d.f.)	
<u>Animals</u>				
Animals	42 (84.0%)	8 (16.0%)	35.96	.00
No Animals	28 (31.1%)	62 (68.9%)	(1 d.f.)	
<u>Children</u>				
Children	12 (57.1%)	9 (42.9%)	0.50	.48
No Children	58 (48.7%)	61 (51.3%)	(1 d.f.)	
<u>Music</u>				
Background Music	44 (48.4%)	47 (51.6%)	0.39	.82
Foreground Music	17 (54.8%)	14 (45.2%)	(2 d.f.)	
No Music	9 (50.0%)	9 (50.0%)		

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