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Super Bowl Ad Trends to Expect this Year

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The Super bowl is here once again — clearly “an important viewing” for not only football fans but anyone and everyone. The biggest game of the year pitting the offensive juggernaut, the Matt Ryan-led Falcons against the by-far-the- most-prolific team of the past decade, the seemingly unstoppable Brady-Belichick trademarked Patriots.

Then there’s another “Big Game” — the game within the game. The battle of the advertisers. More than 50 commercials, about 40 brands, spending a combined \$300

110 million. At a staggering \$5 million per 30 seconds of airtime (throw in another \$1 million for the production cost of a typical ad), these brands are firing on all cylinders. Stunts, gimmicks, extravagant sets, high-priced celebrity cameos, evocative songs, multimedia engagement, multi-screen blitzes — whatever it takes to grab the eyeballs, tug at the heartstrings and above all generate — yes, the coveted four-letter word – buzz.

The trend in Super Bowl advertising these past six years is to pre-release the ads days before Super Bowl Sunday. The idea is to start creating the buzz with teaser ads, trailers and sneak peeks leading up to the “big reveal.” This strategy of the weeklong ramp-up to the big game was catapulted by the massive success of the now classic VW “[The Force](#)” commercial, which was “leaked” on Wednesday before the 2011 Super Bowl. By 8 a.m. Thursday, it had been viewed 1.8 million times on YouTube and had racked up 17 million views even before kickoff. Today, “The Force” has 61 million views on YouTube and is still the most shared Super Bowl ad of all time. It apparently paid for itself long before it was shown during the game.

This year, Super Bowl LI has been no different so far — more than 25 full version ads have already been pre-released as of Thursday afternoon. Not to mention plenty of teasers, sneak peeks and trailers of ads. Ironically, ads about ads. Some of the more interesting teaser ads are from Wix.com featuring Gal Gadot (Wonder Woman) and Jason Statham (Transporter), Snickers featuring Adam Driver (Kylo Ren from Star Wars) in the first ever “live ad,” Squarespace starring John Malkovich, and Hyundai touting the first commercial entirely shot, edited and produced during the three-hour game.

However, the two brands that have so far generated the most buzz have been a rookie brand, 84 Lumber, a first-timer to the Super Bowl stage and the most legendary Super Bowl advertising brand of all, Budweiser.

[84 Lumber](#), a Pennsylvania-based building supplies firm had planned to air a 90-second spot with a message about job recruitment that would highlight its inclusive and broad hiring policies that offer out-of-the-box career opportunities.

Sounds fine, except for one problem. Apparently the original 90-second commercial was rejected by Fox because it contained a depiction of a border wall — an image that would likely spark too much controversy in an already politically charged environment. Fox says that it is all too leery of any political statements or needling of sensitive topics during the broadcast.

84 Lumber is still planning to air the 90-second spot at the hefty price of \$15 million for the airtime alone, before halftime. No word yet as to the new version or the edited version of the ad.

Naturally the question arises: Was this so-called “rejected ad” a well-calculated ploy to generate buzz? Hard to say, but if so, then mission accomplished. Pre-SB conversation about 84 Lumber is off to the races. Millions are waiting to see what is finally offered up on Sunday.

However, by far the greatest conversation and controversy are being generated by Budweiser's pre-released 60-second spot titled "Born the Hard Way."

"Born the Hard Way," is unquestionably timely given the recent ban on refugees and immigration. The spot is an eloquently produced period piece. An artful stylistic documentary focusing on a German immigrant who overcomes many hurdles to emigrate from Hamburg, Germany, to America.

Despite hostile crowds shouting, "You're not wanted here," and "Go back home," he arrives in St. Louis, where, it turns out, he ends up becoming one half of the founding duo that created Anheuser-Busch. The inspiring story of Adolphus Busch who went on to create the iconic American beer, Budweiser.

As expected, this spot is already creating significant ripples in an already volatile and politically polarized environment. Some feel that Budweiser has stepped over the line by making a political statement on a stage where brands are expected to remain guardedly apolitical. Others are lauding the company for being bold enough to lean into the harsh limelight and resonate with plurality of the American culture with this arguably inspirational message.

Is it only a coincidence or is it ironic that President Donald Trump's grandfather also emigrated from Germany? These are the questions being asked. Whichever side of this debate we find ourselves on, the fact remains that it is a very risky and bold move by Budweiser during these uncertain times. Can the buzz and conversation help the brand enough to offset the possible alienation of a very large part of its target population?

The danger of trying to connect with a large segment using a political statement is that you might offend an equally large segment. Unless of course most viewers see this (as Budweiser claims it is) just a simple, straightforward inspirational story heralding Americana. In fairness to Anheuser-Busch — this ad began scripting and

In my opinion, this could go either way for Budweiser — a huge swing and a miss, or a massive home run. (Is it gauche to use a baseball metaphor in a football piece?) Only time will tell. I for one will be rubbernecking social media posts and tweets Sunday night onward to see what ensues.

In any case whatever happens, one thing's for sure. On Sunday, whether the game's a good one or a great one, make sure you you don't miss the real game within the game — the commercials. Keep the bathroom breaks and beer runs to a minimum and keep the DVR remote handy — you don't want to miss that \$5 million 30 second spot.



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Abhi Biswas has a diverse background delivering numerous marketing management courses for MBA and EMBA programs over the past 20 years at Purdue University, Southern Methodist University, and at UTD. The courses that he teaches include, Principles of Marketing, Advertising and Promotions Management, Consumer Behavior and Brand Management. He has also developed and taught the capstone Marketing Strategy course, Pricing Management, Marketing Research, Product Management and International Marketing. [Read more articles](#)

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