

Super Bowl advertisers tread carefully in divisive climate

February 3 2017, by Mae Anderson



This photo provided by Kia Motors America shows a scene from the company's spot for Super Bowl 51, between the New England Patriots and Atlanta Falcons, Sunday, Feb. 5, 2017. Melissa McCarthy humorously takes on political causes like saving whales, ice caps and trees, each time to disastrous effect, in Kia's 60-second third-quarter ad to promote the fuel efficiency of its 2017 Niro crossover. (Kia Motors America via AP)

Super Bowl advertisers are treading carefully this year to avoid alienating customers as a divisive political climate takes some of the buzz away from what is usually the biggest spectacle on TV.

Ad critic Barbara Lippert says that while "people need an escape," like the Super Bowl, this year's matchup on the field feels "so much less important than what's going on politically."

To get the attention back, some advertisers are turning to nostalgia, celebrities and marketing stunts. P&G is sexing up Mr. Clean, Honda is featuring nine celebrities and Snickers is running a live ad.

Others are touching on social issues, without being too blunt about it. Budweiser won the pre-game buzz with a sweeping cinematic ad showcasing founder Adolphus Busch's 1857 immigration from Germany to St. Louis. Although it has been in the works since May, the ad felt topical, as it was released online just days after President Donald Trump's travel ban against people from seven Muslim-majority countries. The ad got more than 8 million views on YouTube in just four days.

Although many brands released ads online ahead of time, there will still be surprises during Fox's Super Bowl broadcast Sunday. At \$5 million for a 30-second spot, and an expected U.S. audience of more than 110 million, the pressure is on.



This photo provided by Lexus shows a still from the company's "Man and Machine" Super Bowl 51 spot. The New England Patriots face the Atlanta Falcons in Super Bowl 51, on Sunday, Feb. 5, 2017. (Lexus via AP)

TIPTOEING AROUND POLITICS

Audi's spot addresses gender equality as a man muses about his daughter receiving equal pay as men one day.

Building supplies retailer 84 Lumber had to revise its original ad because a scene featuring a border wall was deemed too controversial by Fox. The new ad shows a Mexican woman and her daughter making a trip by foot across Mexico. The ad's ending will be revealed at halftime at journey84.com ; the website suggests excised footage will be shown.

And Kia attempts a humorous approach. In an ad for the Niro car,

Melissa McCarthy takes on political causes like saving whales, ice caps and trees, each time to disastrous effect. The message: "It's hard to be an eco-warrior, but it's easy to drive like one" with a fuel-efficient Niro.

Though advertisers are being extra careful, taking on any sort of political topic might backfire, says Mark DiMassimo, CEO of ad agency DiMassimo Goldstein. Against the backdrop of an "emboldened, enraged or traumatized audience," he says, themes that might have been innocuous in the past "seem more strident and jarring this year."



This photo provided by Wix shows a still from the company's first Super Bowl 51 spot featuring Gal Gardot and Jason Statham. The New England Patriots face the Atlanta Falcons in Super Bowl 51, on Sunday, Feb. 5, 2017. (Wix via AP)

STUFFED WITH CELEBRITIES

In turbulent times, brands can count on celebrities to ensure goodwill among consumers.

And why use one celebrity when you can have many? In Honda's ad , the high-school yearbook photos of Amy Adams, Steve Carell, Viola Davis, Missy Elliott, Tina Fey, Magic Johnson, Jimmy Kimmel, Stan Lee and Robert Redford come to life with special effects. The animations encourage people to follow their dreams in a nod to Honda's longtime slogan, "The Power of Dreams."

Website hosting company Squarespace shows an intense John Malkovich berating the owner of johnmalkovich.com domain name.

Justin Bieber shows off dance moves to tout T-Mobile cellphone offerings. For the baby boomer crowd, Mercedes-Benz shows a biker gang being amazed by Peter Fonda's AMG GT roadster to the tune of Steppenwolf's "Born to be Wild."



This photo provided by Wix shows a still from the company's second Super Bowl 51 spot featuring Gal Gardot and Jason Statham. The New England Patriots face the Atlanta Falcons in Super Bowl 51, on Sunday, Feb. 5, 2017. (Wix via AP)

"The proliferation of athletes and more personalities is a reflection of not taking too much risk," says Kelly O'Keefe from Virginia Commonwealth University's advertising graduate program. "When in doubt get a personality."

BLAST FROM THE PAST

Anheuser-Busch joins Mercedes-Benz in trying to reach consumers with nostalgia. The brewer's ad shows a mountain man opening a can of Busch beer to the sound of "Buschhhh." It's a nod to the brand's ad campaign, introduced in 1978, which lasted for decades.

Meanwhile, Bud Light is bringing back the ghost of its 1980s spokesdog Spuds Mackenzie—literally. In its ad, the dog appears as a ghost dangling in the air, urging a Bud Light drinker to go out and join his friends, like the ghosts in the holiday classic "A Christmas Carol."

And P&G sexes up its Mr. Clean mascot, introduced as an animated character in 1958. In the new ad , he distracts a woman as he cleans her kitchen.



This photo provided by Budweiser shows a scene from the company's commercial for Super Bowl 51, between the New England Patriots and Atlanta Falcons, Sunday, Feb. 5, 2017. (Budweiser via AP)

"Emotions are the secret sauce of getting people to do things, and nostalgia is a great reason for people to pay attention," says Devra Prywes of video analytics firm Unruly.

HERE'S TO HEALTH

After 10 years, Frito-Lay has retired its "Crash the Super Bowl" campaign for Doritos. Those ads, created by consumers, were usually filled with slapstick humor.

Taking its place? A healthier approach. PepsiCo is featuring its new bottled water called LifeWTR and its sugar-free soft drink, Pepsi Zero Sugar. Bai Brands investor Justin Timberlake helps promote the company's antioxidant-infused drinks. And one of Wonderful Co.'s 15-second ads promotes the health benefits of its pistachios.

Avocados from Mexico is focusing on its "healthy fats" in a humorous ad showing a secret society subliminally influenced by Jon Lovitz to chow down on guacamole.



This photo provided by Budweiser shows a scene from the company's commercial for Super Bowl 51, between the New England Patriots and Atlanta Falcons, Sunday, Feb. 5, 2017. The scene depicts when Anheuser-Busch co-founder Adolphus Busch, foreground left, is welcomed to St. Louis after traveling by boat from Germany. (Budweiser via AP)

SURPRISES

The biggest buzz may come from what hasn't been revealed ahead of time.

Snickers' ad with Adam Driver and a "Wild West" theme will be performed live during the third quarter.

Hyundai tapped "Deepwater Horizon" director Peter Berg to shoot an ad during the game itself for airing right after the game ends.

Chrysler, long known for its surprise two-minute ads starring celebrities like Eminem and Clint Eastwood, won't even say whether it's advertising this year. Coca-Cola says it bought two spots, but it's keeping the topic a mystery.

"Ultimately, the advertiser who gives us sweet relief without that aftertaste is going to win," DiMassimo says. "Something simple, delightful and cheerful."



This photo provided by Budweiser shows a scene from the company's spot for Super Bowl 51, between the New England Patriots and Atlanta Falcons, Sunday, Feb. 5, 2017. The scene depicts when Anheuser-Busch co-founder Adolphus Busch, right, after traveling by boat from Germany, met fellow immigrant Eberhard Anheuser. (Budweiser via AP)



This frame grab from video provided by Procter & Gamble shows Rob Gronkowski, right, and Jeffrey Tambor in Tide's "Gronk's Cleaners Discount" Super Bowl 51 spot. The New England Patriots face the Atlanta Falcons in Super Bowl 51, on Sunday, Feb. 5, 2017. (Procter & Gamble via AP)



This file image from video provided by Hyundai Motor America shows former NFL football player and current assistant coach Mike Singletary in Hyundai's Super Bowl 51 ad teaser. Hyundai is shooting and editing a 90-second ad during the game itself that will air directly after the Super Bowl between the New England Patriots and the Atlanta Falcons, on Sunday, Feb. 5, 2017. (Hyundai Motor America via AP, File)



This photo provided by Bud Light shows a scene from the company's "Ghost Spuds," spot for Super Bowl 51, between the New England Patriots and Atlanta Falcons, Sunday, Feb. 5, 2017. Bud Light is re-introducing the brand's '80s pop culture icon and man's best friend, Spuds MacKenzie. (Bud Light via AP)



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This photo provided by Mercedes-Benz USA shows an image from the company's "Easy Driver" Super Bowl 51 commercial. To target baby boomers, Mercedes-Benz enlisted the Coen Bros. to direct an update to the tune of Steppenwolf's "Born to be Wild." Bikers at a bar are furious that their bikes have been blocked by a car, until they realize it's Peter Fonda driving a Mercedes-Benz AMG Roadster. (Mercedes-Benz USA via AP)



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