



## **NEWS RELEASE**

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Marketing professors report surprising new findings in Super Bowl ad success

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EAU CLAIRE — A little goes a long way when it comes to companies talking about their products in ads aired during the Super Bowl, say University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire marketing professors who have been studying Super Bowl advertising for more than a decade.

"More is definitely less," said Dr. Rama Yelkur, a lead researcher on the project, which researchers believe is the most comprehensive Super Bowl advertising study to date. "If you want to have a popular Super Bowl ad, don't talk much about your products. We found the more advertisers talked about their products on Super Sunday, the less the viewers liked the ads."

The finding is contrary to what conventional advertising wisdom suggests, but the "less is more" factor was a significant finding in their research, said Dr. Chuck Tomkovick, who worked with Yelkur and student researchers on the project.

"How much or how little you say in an ad doesn't matter, but what you talk about matters a lot," said Tomkovick, noting that the current work replicated and expanded research he and Yelkur published in 2001. "The amount of product information shared has a significant impact on ad likeability. Super Bowl audiences demand creativity in commercials and want to hear about new products, but they only want limited information about the product itself."

In their research, Yelkur and Tomkovick identify what variables within the ads cause viewers to rate them high or low in the USA Today Super Bowl ad likeability index, the most widely recognized measure of Super Bowl ad popularity.

"Ad likeability is important because at \$100,000 per second for commercial air time and millions more to create and merchandise their ads, Super Bowl advertisers want to maximize the impact of their investments," Tomkovick said.

Ad popularity also is critical because research shows that likeable advertising persuades consumers to buy the advertised product, Yelkur said.

In their most recent project, the UW-Eau Claire researchers found that the top five variables that influence Super Bowl ad likeability are (in order of importance): the presence of

humor, animals, product information (very little), product category (food and beverages are the best) and the inclusion of children in the ads.

The product information variable (less is better) and the kids variable (more prominence is better) made the top-five list for the first time in the 2009 research, Tomkovick said.

Celebrities and ad length were identified in their 2001 research as helping to determine ad popularity, but by 2009, were no longer relevant to ad popularity, he said.

Celebrities are more visible today than a decade ago, so viewers are less excited about them being in Super Bowl ads, Tomkovick said. And while Super Bowl ads varied quite a bit in length years ago, most Super Bowl ads are now 30-second spots, he said.

"This is why replicating and extending a project is a good thing in research," Tomkovick said. "We expanded the research while also establishing if the original findings still hold true. In this case, we found some but not all of the variables identified in 2001 are still important to Super Bowl ad likeability and we've identified two new variables that are important to ad popularity."

Tomkovick and Yelkur's most recent Super Bowl research included a review of all 462 ads that aired during Super Bowl games from 2000-09, Yelkur said. An abstract of the project, "Predicting Super Bowl Ad Likeability in the New Millennium," will be presented at the Marketing Management Association's academic conference in late March in Chicago, she said. An expanded paper soon will be under review at a leading marketing journal in the coming weeks, she said.

"In our current research, we were more rigorous in how we looked at the ads," Yelkur said. "We didn't just look at the presence of the variables, but also looked at the role they played in the ads. For example, if an animal was in an ad, we determined if it was a main focus or only appeared in it, and then rated it accordingly. It's a richer measurement that will tell us even more about what makes ads likeable."

Their work is valuable to advertisers because interest in Super Bowl ads continues to grow, as does the cost to air ads during the game, Tomkovick said, noting that 30-second ads in the 2010 Super Bowl will exceed \$2.5 million. Research shows that millions of people who tune in are more interested in the ads than in the game, he said.

The product information variable will be of particular interest to advertisers because it means they must find the right balance between sharing enough information about their products

so people know what is being promoted, and not talking so much about a product that it turns viewers away, Yelkur said.

"Ad likeability is not the same as effectiveness," Tomkovick said. "But likeability is a measure of popularity and that correlates to sales, so it's important to advertisers. What we can tell advertisers is that if they want a popular ad, they should include a pinch of animals, a dash of kids and a heavy dose of humor. They also shouldn't talk much about their product. And it helps if they're selling food or beverages, because those products still dominate."

Five UW-Eau Claire students worked with Tomkovick and Yelkur on the current research project. The students reviewed and rated all of the ads on the 10 variables that had been identified as potential influencers of ad likeability.

"This project has been a lot of work but also a lot of fun," said Clay Theiler, a sophomore accounting major from Wausau, Wis. "It was interesting to watch all the ads that ran in the Super Bowls during the last decade. After watching them, it doesn't surprise me that the funny ads are the ones that grab your attention. But I also noticed that I didn't always know the brand even when the ad was very memorable."

Other student researchers involved in the project were Ashley Hofer, a sophomore communications major from Osseo, Wis.; Cassie Olson, a marketing major from Owatonna, Minn., who graduated in 2009; Ashley Olson, a marketing major from Owatonna, Minn., who graduated in 2009; and Daniel Rozumalski, a senior marketing major from De Pere, Wis.

Students have presented the findings at national marketing conferences and will present their work at UW-Eau Claire's Student Research Day in April.

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