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SUPER BOWL AND SUPER COMMERCIALS: AN APPEALS-BASED ANALYSIS ON
SUPER BOWL ADS

by

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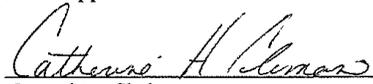
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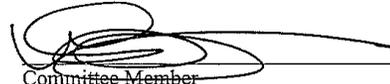
BOB SCHIEFFER
COLLEGE of COMMUNICATION

Super Bowl and Super Commercials: An Appeals-Based Analysis
on Super Bowl Commercials

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Abstract

The Super Bowl is an extravagant sporting event that fuses an eclectic mix of entertainment in order to draw a large number of viewers. The lucrative sporting spectacle is also used as a commercial showcase for new advertising campaigns, and can be viewed as one of the biggest days (if not the biggest) in a calendar year for advertisers. This quantitative study analyzes the presence of sexual, rational, emotional, and humor appeals in 189 Super Bowl commercials from 2015-2017. The study reveals that humor is the most frequently used appeal in Super Bowl advertising, followed by rational, emotional, and sexual appeals. An interesting trend of a reduction in sexual appeals began to emerge. Additionally, based on the raw data, millennials disliked ads more than other age segments set by Ad Meter. Lastly, given the prominence of Super Bowl advertising in cultural discourse, the author considers ethical implications associated with the commercial appeals.

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Introduction

The Super Bowl, a national championship of professional American football, is the most watched television event of the year, and wields significant influence because it creates a cultural dialogue for a wide demographic surrounding the game, the half-time show, and the commercials (Kim, Cheong, & Kim, 2012). In early February of each year, advertising agencies try to deliver a campaign that grabs the attention of the Super Bowl audience and generates a buzz for their clients' brands. This athletic affair is especially influential because it captures a diverse viewership that is inclusive of all ages, genders, and incomes, as it brings together families and friends to watch the event (Lewis, 2009). As the audience has grown over the years, so has the cost to be included in the Super Bowl's advertising showcase.

As the advertisements are a popular draw to the game, commercial costs for a 30-second Super Bowl spot have risen from \$42,000 in 1967 to \$5 million in 2016 (Rapaport, 2017). In 2017, Super Bowl advertisement space sold for as much as \$5.5 million. In comparison, the Oscars, an entertainment awards ceremony that has a fraction of the viewers still brought in \$2 million for the same time allotment, and advertisements that air during regularly-scheduled popular television shows typically cost \$250,000 to \$500,000 for this 30-second time period. Though this is a significant difference, advertisements during popular television shows only capture the attention of two to seven million viewers, whereas these larger events capture a larger audience (Rapaport, 2017). Specifically, 111.3 million viewers tuned in to watch Super Bowl 51 (Battaglio & James, 2017). Not only is the viewership exponentially greater for the Super Bowl compared to everyday television, but also the watching experience is of greater quality. The game is displayed in households and establishments on large high-definition televisions with booming sound, which means the extra money put into producing the commercial is put to good

use. Additionally, the frenzy that surrounds the event also creates added attentiveness, which separates it from other shows that are regularly watched by consumers. Although brands must pay a hefty price for these prime advertising spots, the price tag does not abdicate agencies and companies of their ethical responsibilities. The extensive and diverse viewership of the Super Bowl, and the weight of these advertisements in business and cultural discourse, may impart more ethical responsibility on the brands.

The commercials during the Super Bowl were not always an important element. In fact, prior to 1974 most commercials were mostly cookie cutter, but in 1974 Master Lock created an ad that showed a sharp shooter taking aim at one of their locks (Syken, 2016). The Master Lock ad is the commercial that set the stage for iconic ads like the “Hey Kid” Coca-Cola advertisement featuring Joe Greene. However, the modern showcase of ads started in 1984 when Apple released a commercial for the Macintosh computer. Syken (2016) asserts that companies have run studies that show that advertising during the Super Bowl benefits box office sales of movies that run a commercial and ads that run for companies often see short-term bumps in stock-prices. The commercials have continued to adapt in order to make a lasting impression; however, there are medleys of appeals from which to choose.

In a study evaluating violence and lewd content present in 2015 Super Bowl commercials, Basch, Kecojevic, Cadorett, and Basch (2016) argue that advertising can trigger negative effects on viewer self-esteem, societal norms, and child development. These effects make the content of a largely viewed event especially important. Of the 110 commercials aired during Super Bowl 49, 12 contained risky behavior, 32 encompassed violent acts, and 14 had sexual content. A reasonable viewer can selectively choose what part of the advertisement to devote his or her attention. Advertisers adhere to the concept of a reasonable consumer, which

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assumes that the individual(s) embody the following characteristics: prudent purchaser, not incompetent, not an inattentive reader, not careless, and not negligent (Laczniak & Grossbart, 1990). Thus, given the importance of Super Bowl advertising in cultural discourse and to brands and agencies, and in light of research demonstrating both the potential positive outcomes for advertisers and the possible negative effects of certain advertising appeals on consumers, this study examines the types of appeals used in Super Bowl advertising and considers ethical implications associated with these appeals.

First, this study examines contemporary conceptualizations of what advertising is, how it works, and how it has been criticized. This includes a review of prior literature on four main appeals – humor, sexual, rational, and emotional – that are relevant in advertising. Next, the study measures the presence of the appeals in Super Bowl commercials. The goal is to discover trends in appeals among advertisements in order to give advertisers a better understanding of the current advertising space. Using data from AdMeter, this study further examines commercial popularity across gender and age to uncover additional insights on American preferences. Finally, the author suggests ethical implications and proposes possible future research directions.

Literature Review

Advertising

Definition. Since Daniel Starch's 1923 definition of advertising as "selling in print," considered by many to be the bedrock of advertising, many definitions have been offered to adapt to developing technologies and shifting strategies (as cited in Richards & Curran, 2002). More recently, Dahlen and Rosengren (2016) present three observations – new media and formats, new consumer behaviors, and new extended effects – that redefine advertising as a brand-initiated message that is meant to impact. The new definition takes into account

advertising that is not paid for or distributed by a specific source, such as a web-page or twitter feed. The definition also acknowledges the tools and tactics used by advertisers like big data and the choices that consumers make as active or passive audience members (Jusufovic, 2014).

How advertising works. Lavidge and Steiner (1961) proposed a model for advertising effectiveness, which moves the consumer through six levels ultimately leading to the purchase of the advertised product. The first two stages are awareness and knowledge, which deal with ideas and information that the consumer gathers about a product. The next two steps, liking and preference, deal with the formation of attitudes toward the product. The last two steps, conviction and purchase, motivate the consumer to act on their instincts. Vakratsas and Ambler (1999) propose a consolidated, three-step, version of the model. First, the consumer is exposed to the message, commonly known as the advertising input. The consumer then filters the message with their active or passive perception, which shapes consumer response to an advertisement. The consumer attains a new level of awareness of the ad topic (cognition), followed by feelings or emotions (affect) produced by the ad. This new awareness and emotional pull creates a new experience for the consumer. Finally, this new experience leads to consumer habits, including consumption and brand loyalty. This model holds true, but it has partially changed in the last decade due to the advancements and rising popularity of the Internet. This brief summary of advertising input and consumer response sheds light on how consumers may process advertising appeals, and how it may influence their concepts about Super Bowl advertising and intentions.

A more recent model incorporates the Zero Moment of Truth (ZMOT), which is when a consumer learns about a product or service via the Internet before deciding on a purchase (Lecinski, 2011). The ZMOT model still accepts that advertising inputs influence the consumer, but it circumvents the cognition, affect, and experience cycle. Instead, consumers actively seek

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reviews about previous consumer experiences with a product or service in order to make a well-informed purchase decision. Regardless of how the model is packaged, there are three key elements that capture the essence of future advertising: (a) sellers make goods or services intended to be used by buyers, (b) consumer access to immediate information will change the supply-chain model to a demand-chain model, and (c) data and technological advancements will create a one-to-one communication model that will enhance brand value (Schultz, 2016).

Retention. In order for an ad to be considered successful it must create brand awareness or a state of brand consciousness (Cacioppo & Petty, 1980; Nelson & Mcleod, 2005). Brand consciousness is sensitivity to a product or service that influences the decision of a consumer (Workman & Lee, 2013). Petty, Cacioppo, and Schumann (1983) point out that central and peripheral cues are important elements to utilize when trying to get a consumer to buy a product. The central route assumes that people are actively thinking about information relevant to the product. On the other hand, the peripheral cue assumes people are passively consuming information and are drawn in by secondary elements, such as attractive endorsers or music.

The best-case scenario would be combining both cues in order to attract peripheral consumers while keeping central ones. This is a safe way to keep the consumer enticed regardless of who may be watching because it is entirely situational. The implementation of attractive endorsers, like celebrities, is a valuable way to boost advertising effectiveness because it creates an association with a brand and a well-known figure (Kamleitner & Jyote, 2013). Advertisements have become increasingly more effective at generating a more salient memory by using a combination of marketing, promotional, and viral tactics in order to generate a buzz (Gupta & Lord, 1998).

Memory and how it influences the purchasing decisions of the consumer are continuously evaluated in advertising literature (Cowley & Janus, 2004; Jin, Suh, & Donovan, 2008; Li, 2009). One study evaluating memory showed that viewers of Super Bowl 40 commercials had higher recall rates when brands had multiple commercials – opposed to when brands had fewer commercial spots (Li, 2009). Additionally, brands that strategically placed their commercials in the early portion of the game received a higher viewer recall rate. This finding reiterates the importance of repetition and placement of advertisements. However, repetition and placement are not the only elements involved in creating higher recall rates.

Jin et al. (2008) argue that motivation and repetition are two important factors in generating greater brand recall. Repetition of a brand in the context of Super Bowl commercials means that the viewer will be actively engaged and motivated to see future ads that correspond with the same brand. Cowley and Janus (2004) tested recall rates among competing juice brands and showed that brands that had a unique distinction were easier to recall for consumers. Conversely, brands that lacked a differentiation were still remembered, but they were not remembered as vividly. Jin et al. (2008) contribute to the idea that viewers will recall publicized brands more, and as a result will recall non-publicized brands less. Differentiation hypothesis is an idea that lends itself well to advertising-based research. The hypothesis states that individual characteristics strengthen the identity of certain items on a list making the item more salient (Ratcliff, Clark, & Shiffrin, 1990). For example, there may be a list of athletic shoes that all serve the same functional purpose, but a consumer may associate one of the brands, like Nike, with certain characteristics of winning, jumping higher, or running faster. These brand characteristics make a certain product more memorable than ones that serve a similar purpose. Additionally, the characteristics create a source of differentiation by reducing competition in a

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crowded marketplace by giving products a specific set of traits that fill a memorable niche (Bassi, Pagnozzi, & Piccolo, 2015). Companies use repetition, placement, and differentiation in order to create a competitive advantage in the marketplace and often times these characteristics are transferred to consumers via appeals in commercials. The competitive advantage can leave a lasting impression on most consumers, but sometimes, external meanings associated with the brand can help persuade undecided consumers.

Persuasion

Persuasion is defined as the process of modifying or altering the values, beliefs, or wants of others (O'Shaughnessy & O'Shaughnessy, 2004). Additionally, O'Shaughnessy and O'Shaughnessy (2004) argue that persuasion can be a form of influence, but not all instances of influence are considered persuasion. Persuasion is based on trust and aims to mold consumer beliefs to mirror the persuader's view, whereas influence does not require trust and can happen unintentionally. Ultimately, the consumer must make the final decision. According to Aristotle, persuasion contains communicator intent, audience response, and argument (as cited in Powers, 2007). Aristotle believed that persuasion was an important piece of discourse and should be grappled with ethically; otherwise, persuasion turns into coercion. Appeals that are used in ads act as agents of persuasion, and by using emotional, rational, humorous, or sexual appeals advertisers can persuade the consumer to support the product shown in the ad.

Advertisers use persuasion to strategically manipulate norms in order to change perceptions and generate brand awareness (Payne, 2001). Keiser and Keiser (1987) believed that cognitive changes in attitudes or beliefs are very mild forms of destructive persuasion (used in propaganda), but when used with ethical finesse persuasion can be effective and non-harmful (Powers, 2007).

Persuasion is an important tool for advertisers to master. If used carelessly or misleadingly, it can lead to consumer distrust or avoidance because the product does not meet expectation (Verlegh, Franssen, & Kirmani, 2015). Advertisers and companies must be mindful of factors such as the credibility of the source, the channel of communication, and the cultural appropriateness of the message. In addition to the aforementioned factors, the message must fit the medium and present a topic that is personally relevant or particularly interesting to the receiver (Petty & Cacioppo, 1979). Another factor that can contribute to the effectiveness of the message is the assertiveness with which the message is presented. Some levels of assertiveness correspond with greater perceptions of competency and likability, but if over-done then the message turns aggressive and coercive (Terlutter, Diehl, & Mueller, 2010). If the persuasive advertisement can incorporate all of the elements listed above then the message will have a higher likelihood of effectiveness (Powers, 2007).

Persuasion can be charged with operating in a gray, indefinable area, because it induces a person to believe or do something that may be contrary to their original belief or actions (Diggs, 1964). Persuasion does not always have to influence someone to side with a contrary belief. Individuals can also be persuaded to make decisions aligning with their preceding values. For instance, a viewer's pre-existing belief of gender (sexual appeals) or race stereotypes (humor appeals) can be strengthened when advertisers use persuasion that aligns with their existing values.

Lee (2014) evaluated pre-existing gender stereotyping in political ads. The sample consisted of 270 participants that made inferences about unfamiliar political candidates that were based on manipulated stimuli. The same manipulation of stimuli is sometimes referred to as reframing or adding spin to an issue that arouses interest in a constituent (O'Shaughnessy &

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O'Shaughnessy, 2004). The study revealed that candidates that tackled softer issues—perceived as inherently female traits—attracted a larger number of female votes. In contrast, men were drawn to candidates that exhibited what were considered masculine traits or grappled with tough issues. Lee's (2014) study shows that persuasion tactics can be enhanced to manipulate belief in order to garner corresponding support (Vakratsas & Ambler, 1999). A producer of advertising content should have the right to persuade, but they should also present the facts and accept the outcome (Diggs, 1964).

Coercion. Coercion in advertising is a message containing an implicit threat that forces the receiver to comply, which is completely different than accepting the outcome (Powers, 2007). Coercion is a form of influence that is based in self-interest and does not establish trust with the consumer. Powers (2007) also suggests that not all coercion is bad. In fact, coercion can initiate positive actions from people, much like rehabilitation. Similarly, threat persuasion motivates people to change by posing a high-risk-associated issue and recommends changes be made in order to avoid the risk of threat, which can be shown in advertising with fear or violence appeals (Yoon & Tinkham, 2013). Threat persuasion is grounded in protection motivation theory (PMT).

Rodgers argues that PMT is a process where threats are answered with fear, also known as threat appraisal, and elicits coping appraisal (as cited in Milne, Orbell, & Sheeran, 2002). Coping appraisal mobilizes the individual to seek a solution in order to avoid the presented threat. Threats are not always blatant and can be subliminal in nature. Like coercion, indirect persuasion is also based in self-interest, but indirect persuasion uses figurative language or images, such as metaphors, inferential pictures, or actions to influence a consumer (McQuarrie & Phillips, 2005). Indirect persuasion can be dangerous because it leads the consumer to make

inferences during the ad exposure, which does not negate this threat appraisal. Instead, McQuarrie and Phillips (2005) argue that the spur-of-the-moment connections the consumer makes with the ad or product could lead to an emotional decision-maker. An emotionally vulnerable decision is not necessarily a bad decision, but some viewers, academics, or agencies may perceive this emotional exploitation an ethical gray-area.

Appeals

Advertising is a highly influential medium that has the ability to reflect and shape societal values. In order to persuade a consumer, an advertising agency must produce an effective campaign. The mark of an effective campaign is mobilizing consumers to purchase or positively talk about a product (Lavidge & Setiner, 1961); however, a brand must innately have qualities that attract consumers. The term appeal is given to traits or themes that appear in commercials that are representations of cultural values (Albers-Miller & Gelb, 1996). Appeals often fall short of characterizing the collective cultural values of a society because cultural perspectives differ between individuals. One of the most used dimensions for cultural comparison is individualism and collectivism (Han & Shavitt, 1994).

Individualistic cultures have a primary focus on personal goals that lead to a fondness of independence, competitiveness, and personal gratification (Hofstede, 1980). For instance, North America is considered individualistic; many advertisements use appeals that trigger competitiveness, which plays into the consumer yearning to be the best, look the best, or feel the best. If the product is purchased then it satisfies the need for personal gratification. Conversely, collectivism puts a premium on group-related goals while also emphasizing interdependence, cooperation, and minimal competition (Hofstede, 1980). Asia and Latin America are collectivistic cultures that use appeals that often encourage the consumer to include others,

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especially family. There is also an element of personal gratification, but it is modeled around the consumer becoming the best version of themselves in order to better the group as a whole.

Advertising agencies diversify their efforts when it comes to global campaigns by using semi-localized approaches (Zhou & Belk, 2004), but in the United States the appeals stay mostly based in individualism, especially for advertising's biggest day.

Emotional and rational. Since the early 1980s, the Super Bowl has grown to be more than just a battle for the title of the league's best football team. It is also a showcase for highly anticipated television advertising campaigns (Dougherty, 1982). There are two common appeals used by advertisers to influence consumer behavior. The first tactic is known as a value-expressive appeal or soft-sell appeals, which looks to create an emotional story to induce feelings that align the brand with the consumer's self concept (Johar & Sirgy, 1991; Okazarki, Mueller, & Taylor, 2010). An emotional appeal could ask the viewer to imagine how they might feel if they used the product, or it could simply show a figurative comparison with an individual before and after using the product (Bentley, 2016). The second tactic is known as a utilitarian appeal or hard-sell appeal, which lists brand benefits that align with a consumer's functional expectation (Johar & Sirgy, 1991; Okazarki et al., 2010). A functional appeal could be conveyed by talking about statistics about how the product is made or what tangible benefits it could bring to daily life (Bentley, 2016). Additionally, a rational benefit could use a comparative advertisement that shows how one brand or product is better than another, which mirrors a logical argument. Stafford and Day (1995) rephrased the original concepts proposed by Johar and Sirgy, and characterized them as emotional appeals (formerly value-expressive appeals) and rational appeals (formerly utilitarian appeals).

Okazarki et al. (2010) identified three key dimensions of emotional appeals: implicitness, feeling, and image. Similarly, they acknowledged three concepts for rational appeals: explicitness, thinking, and fact. These dimensions were put to the test in a study that evaluated the effectiveness of emotional appeals versus rational appeals in relation to age (Drolet, Williams, & Lau-Gesk, 2007). The study showed that adults 40-years-old and above had a higher recall of ads based in emotional appeals, whereas younger individuals responded more favorably to rational appeals. The study is reflective of socioemotional selectivity theory, which views time as a prerequisite for experience (Fung & Carstensen, 2004). If the target audience includes a demographic that is young (primarily 18-25, but also as old as 40), then it would be prudent for the campaign to use rational appeals. Conversely, if the target audience were to include an older demographic (65 and over), then emotional appeals would be the most effective option (Drolet et al., 2007). Sudbury and Edgar (2016) suggest that the appeal(s) ultimately used in an advertising campaign should be based on the intended target audience, which may mean that there are other appeals aptly suited for captivating a diverse audience.

Humor. Humor is an appeal that has largely gone unchecked by ethical criticisms because a lot of the existing literature provides conflicting results. The use of humor has become an important tactic that marketers and advertising practitioners utilize in campaigns. However, understanding how humor plays a role in attitudes toward the brand, source, and ad are important elements to review. Eisend (2009) conducts a meta-analysis of humor in advertising in order to create a more cohesive understanding of humor appeals. He discovered that humor significantly reduces credibility of the source, but positively influences attitude toward the brand and the ad (Eisend, 2009). However, the humor appeal is amplified when it directly relates to the brand message.

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A working definition of humor is hard to provide because laughter is caused by an assortment of events and the perception of the consumers differs in regards to what may be considered funny. One scholar who took on the challenge was Raskin (1985) who categorized three widely accepted tactics used in humor appeals: arousal-safety, incongruity, and disparagement. Arousal-safety is the idea that humor provides an escape or deviation from social norms, and can also incorporate emotional elements (Speck, 1991). Incongruity is the contrast between two circumstances that do not match up, which makes the viewer laugh (Shabbir & Thwaites, 2007). Lastly, disparagement is based on malice, hostility, or aggression, or laughing at the misfortunes of others (Raskin, 1985). Gulas and Weinberger (2006) argue that humor elicits a response that combines pleasure, happiness, and fun. This response is based on the intensity of the humor stimuli and how it is presented. Some of the devices that were identified in television built off of Speck (1991) and were the following: pun, satire, irony, understatement, joke, and ludicrous (Gulas & Weinberger, 1992; Gulas & Weinberger, 2006). Shabbir and Thwaites (2007) conducted a study that analyzed the humor appeals in 238 commercials. The study showed that 175 of those ads contained deceptive claims, which is a statement or act that leads the consumer to believe something about the brand that is not verifiably true (Aditya, 2001). Of those deceptive ads, 74.5 percent contained some degree of humor appeal that worked to mask the deception present in the ad; however, 63 commercials were deception-free, and used acceptable humor appeals. The study aligned incongruity with vague or ambiguous claims, false claims with arousal-safety, and disparagement with omission or sometimes vagueness, which leads the consumer to suspend disbelief (Shabbir & Thwaites, 2007).

Shabbir and Thwaites (2007) shed an interesting light on the idea that humor is often used to mask deception in various ads. Blackford, Gentry, Harrison, and Carlson (2011) add to

the growing area of literature by suggesting that humor is also used in tandem with appeals to violence. King (2000) points out that humor and violence have been prominent themes since early cinematography, like the works of Charlie Chaplin. Humor cues often add a context that alters the meaning of violent acts, or unscrupulous behavior (King, 2000). Blackford et al. (2011) conducted a study that looked at the correlation between humor and violence during Super Bowl advertisements in 2005, 2007, and 2009. The study showed that out of the 180 total commercials there were 143 instances where appeals to humor and violence were present. King (2000) adds that humor may also be influenced by gender stereotypes, which may open the door to humor-based sexual appeals.

Sexual. Sexual appeals often come in the form of objectification of women, but sometimes men can also be the objects of the appeal. Often, symbolic sexual appeals aid in persuading consumers to purchase unneeded items, which can often be framed as choice enhancement versus consumer protection (Gould, 1994; Richmond & Hartmon, 1982). There are two main types of research that analyze the effects and morality of sexual appeals on both intended and unintended audiences. Teleological research focuses on the potential harms or benefits of arousal, alertness, or tension that can be brought on by sexual appeals (LaTour, 1990). At the same time teleological research also looks at the anticipated and involuntary effects of sexual appeals. For instance, an ad may have subtle sexual characteristics, but could be viewed by different groups as a promotion for pornography or obscene content. Severn, Belch, and Belch (1990) conducted a study to gauge effectiveness of sexual stimuli and they found that sexual appeals were most effective when it corresponded with a product that was sexual in nature. Conversely, brands that were not sexual in nature that attempted to use sexual appeals were less effective and acted as a distraction from the message.

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Deontological research focuses on the morality of the appeals and whether they are appropriate. This research studies social and cultural norms in order to form a greater understanding of underlying views. Gould (1992) presents three prominent factions of society: (a) liberals who want to protect freedom of speech, (b) feminists who find sexual appeals degrading, and (c) religious and conservative groups whose values oppose the appeals. Gould points out that an important part of weeding out the moral acceptableness of sexual appeals is understanding whether it is used as a marketing tool or tries to impress an ideology or agenda on the consumer. Sexual appeals in advertising are an issue that can be challenging to define because of the variance in definition of many of the self-imposed regulations (Rotfeld & Taylor, 2009). Many of the codes of conduct prohibit obscenity and call for content that is decent, but that is reflective of changing cultural values. Sex and decency can be defined under three categories: sexism, sexuality, and sexual objectification (Boddewyn, 1991). Decency, in most cases, assumes a baseline standard of good taste and modesty. Therefore, decency is breached when sexism, overt sexuality, or sexual objectification are used.

Sexism taps into an idea of institutionalized stereotypes that demean the sex of an individual (like a womanizer or a stupid dad) in comparison to another party. Zayer and Coleman (2015) conducted a qualitative study on advertising practitioners that revealed that gendered advertising largely mirrors society and frames women as vulnerable and men as immune to the effects of advertising, but it is still possible for men to be vulnerable and women to be immune. Thus, appeals of sexuality can take on imagery or suggestiveness that mainly uses female focused characters in order to affect the presumed susceptible demographic. Sexual objectification refers to a gender that is used as a decoration in order to attract attention, which can often be used to demand the attention of immune male demographic (Boddewyn, 1991).

However, Boddewyn's definition does not directly address sexual symbolism, which is a dimension incorporated into Richmond and Hartmon's study (1982). They defined symbolism using Freudian terms such as: erect, prone, soft, hard, or moist. The scale encapsulates an important element that Boddewyn alludes to in her concept of sexuality, but does not directly address. Overt sexuality, in advertising, is a large area of research, but most of the literature that exists has been conducted on print ads. Reichert, LaTour, and Ford (2011) conducted a study where they analyzed print ads and found a positive correlation between the respondents who approved of lower levels of nudity (demure, partially clad, or nude) and their attitude toward the brand, purchase intent, and arousal. Conversely, respondents showed a negative correlation between higher levels of nudity and their attitude toward the brand, purchase intent, and arousal.

In order to protect the consumer, Boddewyn (1991) suggests that agencies carefully target ads in order to avoid conflicts, research the impacts of sexual appeals on unintended audiences, and consider the potential negative consequences on consumers. Zayer and Coleman (2015) use institutional theory in order to understand how gender perceptions develop in advertising agencies. Institutional theory is made up of the following three pillars: regulatory, normative, and cognitive. The regulative element deals with the rules and regulations of an organization, which is supplemented by the normative component that assumes that people have their own moral values, but must adhere to the expectations of their institution (Scott, 2014). Lastly, the cognitive portion is culturally bound and suggests that people use a shared social understanding in order to navigate ethical differences in the workplace (Scott, 2014; Zayer & Coleman, 2015). Thus, it is important to understand advertising institutions in order to gather a greater understanding of the corporate culture that is responsible for suggesting certain appeals.

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Advertising Agencies and Persuasion Strategies: Trust, Responsibility, and Ethical Practice

Trust. Advertising agencies and their employees must consider the importance of ethical performance when the advertising message looks to establish a bond of trust with consumers.

Trust in an organizational relationship is best defined as a willingness of a client or consumer to be vulnerable to the creative solutions of an agency based on the expectation that the agency will further the client's brand or positively contribute to the consumer's life (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995). If an agency does not have a sense of trust and respect within its own ranks then it seems counterintuitive to expect that consumers or clients will trust the campaigns that are created.

Krugman and Ferrell (1981) conducted an intra-organizational ethical study that explored the perceptions of advertising agencies and their corporate advertising practitioners. The study centered on practitioner beliefs about their peers and superiors' ethical beliefs and differences in agency perception of clients versus client perception of agency. Researchers revealed that agency practitioners thought of themselves as less ethical than upper management, but thought of their peers as less ethical than themselves (Krugman & Ferrell, 1981). Additionally, corporate practitioners viewed their ethics as being noble while advertising agencies were viewed as having a less desirable ethical standard, and the ad agency respondents were in agreement. McColl (2014) examines this through a survey conducted by USA Today in conjunction with Rubin Postaer and Associates. This survey showed that 76 percent of agency executives believe that corporate practitioners do not take enough risks, which supports Krugman and Ferrell's claims (McColl, 2014). The same survey also showed that 98 percent of advertising agencies agree that trust is the most important element to a successful client-agency relationship. The survey shows the importance of trust within the company and for the consumer (Krugman &

Ferrell, 1981; McColl, 2014), but quality of trust should be broken down in order to understand how to establish this key feature (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995)

Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman (1995) propose a model of trust that is rooted in three key factors: ability, benevolence, and integrity. If a 'trustor' believes that the 'trustee' is competent, has a desire to do good, and follows an acceptable code of conduct then perceived risk is minimal. Presumably a client-agency relationship that ends with a favorable outcome (profit or brand awareness) would positively affect the 'trustor's' level of confidence, which is synonymous with trustworthiness, in the 'trustee.' However, an unfavorable outcome (reduced sales or negative publicity) would do the opposite. The same is true of the relationship with the consumer. This is important because the consumer supports or snubs the advertising efforts. Kodish (2006) conducted a study that expanded the concepts of Mayer et al.'s (1995) research by including an additional framework for trust. The study named trustworthiness, communication, context, and organizational support as important antecedents to organizational trust.

Responsibility. Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is a common term used in business that often assumes a corporation has an unspoken agreement with the community that works to legitimize their presence in society (Kendrick, Fullerton, & Kim, 2013). Typically, ethical initiatives start with the employees and include issues such as human rights, diversity, workplace safety, and workplace conservation. Because of its comprehensive definition in literature, CSR addresses a broad range of topics. As well, CSR has also been referred to as sustainable development (SD) and corporate ethical footprints (Baden & Harwood, 2012; Kendrick et al., 2013). All of these terms use organizational ethics in relation to changes in community behavior, values, and attitudes.

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Advertising agencies also have a duty to community and values, but they donate their time and services instead of money. Waller and Lanis (2009) looked at annual reports disclosed by advertising agencies and found a trend of free social initiative campaigns. The pro bono work, in lieu of monetary donations, carried out by advertising agencies is a big factor in the flow of ideas to the community; however, there is no universal guide for advertising, which means that the social responsibilities are incongruent around the world (Waller & Lanis, 2009), but this study centers around advertising in the United States. Kendrick et al. (2013) surveyed 1,045 American Advertising Federation (AAF) club members from a variety of universities across the United States in order to gauge student concepts about CSR. The data showed that AAF members believed that doing no harm (ethical responsibility) should be the primary focus while abiding by the law (legal responsibility) should be the secondary focus of CSR. The tertiary focus of agency CSR should be their clients and stakeholders (economic responsibility) and the last expectation should be monetary donations (discretionary responsibilities). The study revealed that most students seemed to focus on the advertising message and not the other functions of advertising agencies. Drumwright and Murphy (2009) assert that CSR may be used to mask poor intra-agency ethical behavior.

Ethics. As agencies and private businesses gain more power in the free market, it is important that agencies recognize their ethical obligation to be virtuous even with the deregulation of certain forms of electronic media (Cunningham, 1999). The creation of the Internet has led to an array of new ways that advertisers can influence potential consumers. Advertising is a unique application of communication strategy and influence that uses verbal signifiers and imagery in order to persuade consumers (Barroso, 2014). In order to distribute responsibility evenly upon the consumer and the advertising entity deontological ethics can be

used. Deontology is means-based ethics, which means that an emphasis is put on the duty or obligations of an individual or organization. An act is right or wrong based on underlying principles and not on the consequence (Gower, 2008). Immanuel Kant argued that actions are moral when they are done out of an obligation to be honest and fair, which seeks to treat people with integrity and not means to an end (Browning, 2015). Jurgen Habermas tries to establish a communication grounding for Kantian ethical theory, which means that both are deontological in nature. Additional scholars built off of Habermas and deviated from solo moral reflection and include a community dialogic aspect (as cited in Alexander, 1985; Leeper, 1996).

Habermas sets out four necessary elements for claims that are made in ethical communication: they must be understandable, they must be truthful, they must be appropriate, and they must be sincere (Gower, 2008). In relation to advertising during the Super Bowl – that would mean that commercials must be appropriate for the audience, they must contain truthful information (not be riddled with inaccuracies), and can be understood by the viewers. Although Habermas' ethical components are important advertising embodiments to Kantian theory it is hard to implement. The problem with this model is that advertisers cannot accurately predict the audiences that will be exposed to the ads that run during the Super Bowl because the viewership is an astronomical number compared to standard viewer ratings.

Pearson (1989) adapted a set of communication contingent requirements that help make Habermas' theory easier to apply. Pearson added that viewers must have the following opportunities: to begin and end communication, suggest topics and initiate topic changes, ability to provide a response and have the response heard, and select channels of communication (Gower, 2008; Leeper, 1996; Pearson 1989). The addition of these components creates a dialogic-based two-way symmetrical communication model (Browning, 2015), which offers the

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interchange of ideas with the hopes of creating a more ethical advertising campaign. Ideally, the framework would take into account changing societal values since the feedback loop would be ongoing between agencies and their clients in addition to the agency and the potential consumers. If an organization were listening to consumer dialogue then the organization would be open to change, out of a duty to be fair and honest, which is inherently deontological. For instance, GoDaddy leaked a commercial that seemed to support puppy mills and private breeding. It was immediately followed by a flood of criticisms, and resulted in the commercial being pulled from airing in the Super Bowl (Monllos, 2015). The commercial was replaced with a different commercial that was less controversial. If a company looked to show dialogue in use this would be a great example of duty-based ethics at play.

However, there are some advertising agencies that have done harm to consumers by engaging in deceptive campaigns (Amazeen, 2016; Rotfeld & Taylor, 2009). The deceptive campaigns have damaged consumer trust and Amazeen (2016) argues that consumers should be educated in ethical problem solving, which would elevate some of the responsibility placed upon agencies. Drumwright and Murphy (2009) conducted in-depth interviews on opinion-leaders at large advertising agencies and universities in order to gauge shifting ethical trends in the advertising industry. The study showed a pattern of changing ethics in response to advancements made in technology. The opinion leaders pointed out that ethical issues occur as result of internal and external business practices. Internal business includes management, employees, and client-based relations; external business works with traditional media, new media, transparency, and privacy.

Internal practice. Intra-business ethics are typically set by legal rulings, organizational policies, regulatory agencies, and professional codes; however, communication and responsible

delegation of projects is a task left to management (Bird & Waters, 1989). In order for management to protect their personal reputation, Bird and Waters (1989) suggest that upper management stifles ethical talk, also referred to as moral muteness, in order to maintain harmony and efficiency of subordinates. An alternative suggestion for management would be a different system of thinking, which is commonly recognized as moral imagination. Moral imagination is the ability of an individual to disengage and reflect on different moral perspectives in order to envision a different moral solution (Drumwright & Murphy, 2004; Werhane, 2002).

In order for agencies to circumvent moral muteness, it is often efficient to hire management that has the capacity to see different moral perspectives and create a form of moral resistance (Stueber, 2011). Drumwright and Murphy (2004) conducted in-depth interviews with advertising practitioners and found that many of the institutions felt degrees of moral myopia, a distortion of ethical values. The qualitative study showed that practitioners often assumed that the legal standard is the moral standard, which contributes to a skewed view of ethics. Some practitioners recognized moral dilemmas but often separate their workplace ethics from their non-work ethics. The workplace ethics differ because there is an underlying belief that their job is to satisfy the client. However, it is important to mention that the same study did reveal that there are some advertising professionals that recognize morally questionable circumstances and address them, which included many of the people that had the capacity for moral imagination. Many of the morally imaginative respondents felt that their peers did not take issue with the ethically questionable content, which may have been due to their own distorted view of ethics. Interestingly, practitioners that spoke up when faced with ethical dilemmas were found in clusters at certain agencies. Lambiase (2013) presents an article of a female employee that was unsatisfied with workplace ethics, and when placed in a position to sacrifice her own ethics opted

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to resign from the position. The article encourages prospective employees to always question the ethics of a company in conjunction with research in order to make sure that the code of conduct is in line with his or her own ethical code. However, there are some that compartmentalize workplace and non-workplace ethics, which can be a sign of moral myopia.

External practice. Moral myopia also exists in external practice mostly in the realm of new and nontraditional media. Practitioners and academics believe that ethical behavior has not been clearly defined in the technologically driven mediums, which leads to lack of checks and balances (Drumwright and Murphy, 2009). The lack of regulations for viral marketing, virtual marketplaces, product placement, and direct marketing causes issues with transparency, privacy, and consumer response. Transparency is the biggest issue that advertisers face with the advent of the Internet. The reasonable consumer is put to the test because advertisers often produce “native” content, which blends into consumer social media surroundings (Drumwright & Murphy, 2004). The native content uses big data in order to pinpoint consumers that have the greatest potential to use the product being advertised. The data being used poses issues to consumer privacy, and agencies should take an initiative to create safeguards against privacy abuses (Snyder, 2011).

The Internet also creates an interesting problem with content created by users that can either respond to agency campaigns or use them as parody, whereas traditional media does not pose the same problems. The Federal Trade Commission is the moderator of content that is created for television, print, or radio and as such must be fair, non-deceptive, materially representative, not likely to mislead, and fit for a reasonable consumer (Gower, 2008). The term reasonable consumer is one that stirs up some confusion because the law is not intended to protect people that are feeble-minded, foolish, or inattentive (Hyman & Tansey, 1990; Lacznia

& Grossbart, 1990). The Institution Review Board (IRB) claims that researchers have a duty to protect the segments of the population that are vulnerable including children, prisoners, and the mentally disabled (Amdur & Bankert, 2011). The vulnerable segments do not have the ability to consent to risk, reward, or potential coercion (Snyder, 2011). Researchers have more stringent codes in place to protect members of society that are subjected to research; therefore, it is justifiable for advertisers (who should also be classified as researchers) to adhere to a similar code of conduct.

The code should be enforced when there is the greatest likelihood of impressionable viewers. Alley (1985) uses iconic shows like *Amos 'n' Andy*, *Father Knows Best*, *Andy Griffith Show*, and *Leave it to Beaver* to show the prevalence of issues during heavily watched content. The shows were filled with sexual and racial stereotyping. If the stereotyping that occurred in these shows was gradually changed in order to represent the America of today then it seems reasonable to think that commercials that air during heavily watched content like the Super Bowl should also reflect the same changes. Ads should not corrupt the values of society especially when there may be millions of impressionable children watching. In 2008, there were approximately 14 million children that watched the Super Bowl, and since then overall viewership has increased, which would lead one to reasonably estimate that the number of children watching has also gone up (Lewis, 2009). Instead, ads should reaffirm viewer dignity and autonomy (Hyman, 2009).

Research Questions

The primary goal of this study was to gauge the presence of humor, sexual, emotional, or rational appeals that were present in the collection of Super Bowl commercials. A key element of

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the study was focused on the relationship between the popularity of the ad and the mixture of appeals.

RQ1: How often are each of the appeals featured in commercials, and has the frequency increased or decreased from year to year?

RQ2: How does the presence of appeals vary between commercials with different popularity rankings?

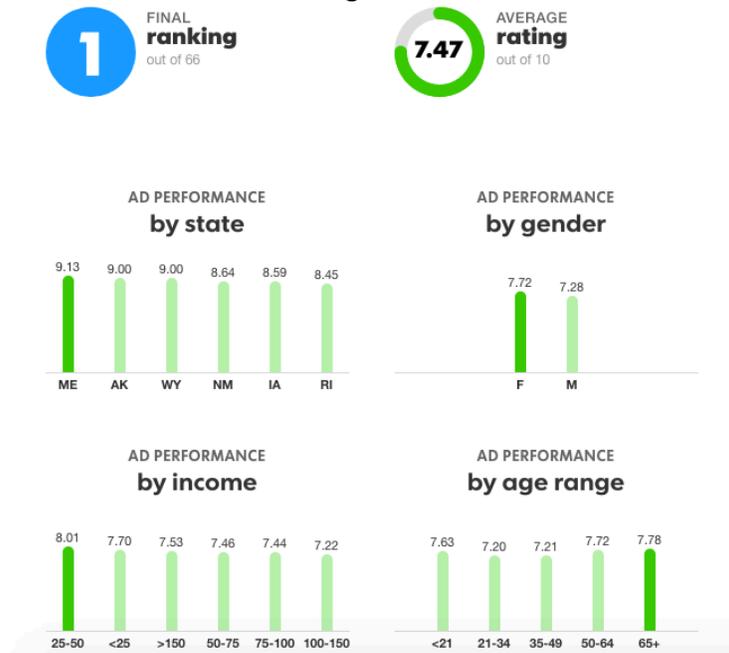
Another goal was to understand the interplay between appeals in relation to the likability score given by certain age segments or genders. Ad Meter provides a likability scale that is broken down into gender, age, income, and location; however, the later two are outside the scope of this study. The evaluation of appeals and the likability they garner from consumers is important as is considering ethical implications of appeals in the Super Bowl commercials.

RQ3: Do certain appeals draw more likability from certain genders and age segments?

Methods

Quantitative content analysis was used to examine the presence of appeals in Super Bowls 49, 50, and 51 commercials. Two college-educated coders analyze for emotional, rational, sexual, and humor appeals that exist in varying degrees. One of the coders was a male and the other was female, which was done in order to include different gender perceptions. The commercials that were analyzed were provided by *USA Today's* Ad Meter, which is considered to be a leading industry tool to gauge public opinion in regards to Super Bowl ads. Each of the videos were imbedded in the website with a YouTube link, but in the event that the link no longer worked YouTube was used to find the specific commercial, and the interface is easily understood (Figure 1). The data that was collected was compared to a likability rating that was provided by Ad Meter.

Figure 1



Sample

The Super Bowl is a unique opportunity for advertisers to unveil their newest commercial campaigns to an attentive audience. As such, it is a tremendous occasion to conduct a quantitative analysis on the appeals present in commercials of the highest quality (quality being synonymous with degree of production excellence and not ethical value). The 2015 Super Bowl was featured on the National Broadcasting Network (NBC) and gathered 114.4 million viewers (Battaglio & James, 2017). The 2016 Super Bowl aired on the Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS), but experienced a slight drop in viewership with 111.9 million viewers. Similarly, the 2017 Super Bowl, which aired on Fox Broadcasting Company (FOX), also experienced a viewership decline with 111.3 million viewers. While the viewership has declined in recent

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years, the number of commercials in the same timeframe has been on the rise. According to *USA Today*, there were 62 commercial spots in 2015 and 2016 (“2015 Ad Meter,” 2015; “2016 Ad Meter,” 2016). In the most recent Super Bowl the number of commercials increased to 65 ads (“2017 Ad Meter,” 2017). The last three Super Bowls resulted in 189 commercials, an average of 63 commercials per year.

The *USA Today* Ad Meter first started in 1989, and since then has rated hundreds of advertisements, but the site only has the top ranked commercial for every year until 2014. The website archive lists all the commercials from 2015, 2016, and 2017. In order to generate the most reliable information, three years of commercials were analyzed (189 total commercials), which equaled two hours and 18 minutes of commercial time. The commercial lengths were 30 seconds or less (58.2%; $n = 110$), one minute (37%; $n = 70$), and one minute and 30 seconds (4.7%; $n = 9$). The messages came from various sources (i.e., spokespeople), with 48.1% ($n = 91$) of the commercials using celebrities or athletes as the main agent by which appeals were delivered. A majority of the ads (56.1%; $n = 106$) used normal everyday people, and 18% ($n = 34$) used other source,s such as animated or fictional characters. However, 21.7% ($n = 41$) of commercials contained two sources. The Ad Meter rankings are the averaged scores of respondents in the United States, and the averages are then ranked from first to last by Ad Meter. The rankings represent a cross-section of American preferences, and may be used to show a relationship between the degrees of varying appeals and how highly the ads rank according to the Ad Meter. The appeals (emotional, rational, humor, sexual) were assigned numerical values to correspond with their varied degrees of prevalence in each ad. The survey was then transferred to Qualtrics survey software, which allowed for more efficient logging of results. The Super Bowl

Ads Code Book (Appendix A) and the Super Bowl Ads Code Sheet (Appendix B) were adapted from the measures and layout used by Bentley (2016).

Operational Definitions

The definitions that were used in the coding process were mentioned in the literature review, but are further unpacked in the Super Bowl Code Book (Appendix A). The appeals in the study were broken down into three varying degrees: *none* (0), *minor* (1), and *major* (2). If there were no examples of the appeals that were coded within the study, then *none* was marked. Additionally, if a *minor* appeal occurred three times in a single commercial then it was reclassified as a *major* appeal.

Rational. A *minor* rational appeal would manifest itself as a comparison of two objects that share similar characteristics but are clearly not the same. An example would be a fast car and a fast animal, which share similar attributes but are not functionally the same. A *major* rational appeal would appear as statistical data, information about a product, and/or a comparison between a product/service and a competing brand. An example of this would be a comparative ad between competing soda companies.

Emotional. A *minor* emotional appeal will talk about how someone feels before, after, or while using a product. Typically, a *minor* emotional ad will indirectly claim that there will be some transformational benefit. Additionally, the feelings can be symbolically shown through moving imagery. For example, if the viewer were to use a specific car it would make him or her feel a certain way, or conversely if the user does not use a car he or she may feel like an outcast. A *major* emotional appeal will use motivational stories, or imagery (e.g., like adorable animals) paired with emotion evoking music.

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Humor. Humor appeals have three different forms: arousal-safety, incongruity, and disparagement (Raskin, 1985). A *minor* humor appeal will contain arousal-safety (innocent mistakes), incongruity (when expectation does not meet reality) or disparagement (or pleasure from someone's mistake), which would be comical fear or anxiety relief, inner secrets, innocent mistakes, irony, exaggeration, or malicious joy. A *major* humor appeal would contain multiple forms occurring simultaneously or a laugh that is caused by the built up plot that resolves itself in one final (large) act.

Sexual. Sexual appeals also have three forms: sexism, symbolic/overt sexuality, and sexual objectification (Boddewyn, 1991; Richmond & Hartmon, 1982). A *minor* sexual appeal will include sexism or symbolic sexuality. An example of a *minor* sexual appeal would be classic stereotypes like a subservient woman or a womanizing male. A *major* sexual appeal would be overt sexuality, sexual objectification (someone being used as prop or a sex object), or a combination of three or more *minor* appeals. An example of a *major* sexual appeal would be an oiled up man or woman straddling a car.

Coder Reliability

After the operational definitions were finalized the coders were given the codebook (Appendix A) in order to familiarize themselves with the definitions. The coders then discussed the definitions and clarified any and all discrepancies in order to ensure a cohesive understanding of the appeals and their corresponding scales. Next, the coders were assigned nine commercials to code in order check the functionality of the operational definitions. The results revealed some additional inconsistencies with the codebook, and required a final revision.

After the revision was made, the coders were assigned 30 total commercials, which was 15.9% of the total sample for the three Super Bowls. The coders independently analyzed the

appeals in each commercial in accordance with the codebook parameters. Krippendorff's alpha is the best measure for inter-coder reliability because it measures agreement between several coders and works at any level of measurement (Hayes & Krippendorff, 2007). Hayes and Krippendorff (2007) argue that an alpha greater than or equal to .80 is the goal for reliable data. There were four separate reliability alphas: emotional appeals had an alpha of .80, rational appeals had an alpha of .93, humor appeals had an alpha of .97, and sexual appeals had the lowest alpha with .79. All the data was analyzed with SPSS, and the remaining data will be explained in the next section. However, the alpha scores surpassed the reliability standard set by Hayes and Krippendorff (2007) with the exception of one, which barely missed the cutoff. The alpha of .79 was considered close enough to .80 to be considered reliable. Therefore, the alphas were accepted, and the lead coder analyzed the remaining 159 commercials. The results of the study are broken down in order of research questions in the following section.

Results

Research Question 1

The first research question asked how often each of the appeals were featured in commercials, and whether the frequency had increased or decreased from year to year. Table 1, Table 2, and Table 3 show the presence of the four appeals in the varying years. Appeals to humor were the most common *major* appeal occurring in 54% of commercials ($n = 102$) and humor appeals have been the most consistently present appeal from year to year, which include both *major* and *minor* (68.8%; $n = 126$). The difference from year to year was not statistically significant. Additionally, *major* rational appeals were also prevalent in 47.1% of commercials ($n = 89$), but were absent from 41.8% ($n = 79$). Minor rational appeals were the least common (11.1%; $n = 21$), and there were no statistically significant differences from year to year. Over

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half of all the commercials used either a *major* (24.9%; $n = 47$) or *minor* (32.8%; $n = 62$) emotional appeal (57.7%; $n = 109$), and the frequency did not change significantly from year to year.

Table 1
Crosstabulation for Frequency of Appeals in 2015 ($n = 62$)

Appeal	None	Minor	Major
Rational	27 (43.5%)	6 (9.7%)	29 (46.8%)
Emotional	30 (48.4%)	14 (26.6%)	18 (29%)
Humor	17 (27.4%)	9 (14.5%)	36 (58.1%)
Sexual	36 (58.1%)	13 (21%)	13 (21%)

Table 2
Crosstabulation for Frequency of Appeals in 2016 ($n = 62$)

Appeal	None	Minor	Major
Rational	25 (40.3%)	8 (12.9%)	29 (46.8%)
Emotional	22 (35.5%)	28 (45.2%)	12 (19.4%)
Humor	18 (29%)	10 (16.1%)	34 (54.8%)
Sexual	38 (61.3%)	16 (25.8%)	8 (12.9%)

Table 3
Crosstabulation for Frequency of Appeals in 2017 ($n = 62$)

Appeal	None	Minor	Major
Rational	27 (41.5%)	7 (10.8%)	31 (47.7%)
Emotional	28 (43.1%)	20 (30.8%)	17 (26.2%)
Humor	26 (40%)	7 (10.8%)	32 (49.2%)
Sexual	44 (67.7%)	12 (18.5%)	9 (13.8%)

Sexual appeals were present to some degree in 37.6% of all commercials ($n = 71$). However, the number of appeals coded as *none* increased from 58.1% ($n = 36$) in 2015 to 61.3% ($n = 38$) in 2016, and made a bigger increase to 67.7% ($n = 44$) in 2017, but although the raw numbers reflect this change, it was not significant.

Research Question 2

The second research question asked if the presence of appeals varied between commercials with different popularity rankings. One-way ANOVA tests were conducted with SPSS in order to analyze the independent means between rankings provided by Ad Meter and the frequency of appeals in their various forms. Each of the ads was coded based on a rank provided by Ad Meter. Additionally, the appeals were also coded in order to test the relationship. A lower mean score equals a higher ranking (e.g., a mean of 1.0 would indicate the highest rank). Higher rankings mean that Ad Meter respondents found an ad more likeable. By contrast, a higher mean score is equal to a lower ranking, which means that respondents liked an ad less. There was a significant relationship between emotional appeals and their popularity ranking assigned by Ad Meter, $F(2,186) = 13.069, p < .001$ (See Table 4).

Table 4
Emotional Appeals and Ad Meter Ranking ANOVA

	SS	df	MS	F	<i>p</i>
Between Groups	7844.161	2	3922.080	13.069	.000***
Within Groups	55819.977	186	300.107		
Total	63664.138	186			

Note: * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

The commercials that contained *major* emotional appeals had the lowest mean ($M = 22.53; n = 47$), which means that they were ranked the highest among all appeal types; however, emotional

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appeals that were *minor* generally ranked lower ($M = 39.66; n = 62$). Similarly, humor appeals followed a concurrent significant pattern, $F(2,186) = 3.790, p < .05$ (See Table 5). Ads with *major* humor appeals had a higher average ranking ($M = 28.99; n = 102$), but *minor* humor appeals had a lower ranking ($M = 37.73; n = 26$).

Table 5
Humor Appeals and Ad Meter Ranking ANOVA

	SS	df	MS	F	<i>p</i>
Between	2492.884	2	1246.442	3.790	.024*
Groups					
Within Groups	61171.253	186	328.878		
Total	63664.138	186			

Note: * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

A significant difference was also found between levels of sexual appeals and Ad Meter rankings, $F(2,186) = 6.191, p < .01$ (See Table 6), but in the opposite direction from the previous tests. *Major* sexual appeals had the highest mean ($M = 41.67; n = 30$), which meant they were ranked the lowest (least favored), whereas commercials with sexual appeals coded as *none* had a low mean and high ranking (most favored) ($M = 29.16; n = 118$). This means that ads with no sexual appeals garnered the highest likability.

Table 6
Sexual Appeals and Ad Meter Ranking ANOVA

	SS	df	MS	F	<i>p</i>
Between	3973.774	2	986.887	6.191	.002**
Groups					
Within Groups	59690.363	186	320.916		
Total	63664.138	186			

Note: * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

Ads with different levels of rational appeals also differed significantly in likeability, $F(2,186) = 3.314, p < .05$ (See Table 7). Ads with *major* rational appeals ranked lower on likeability ($M = 35.81; n = 89$). Ads with *minor* rational appeals ranked higher ($M = 27.24; n = 21$), which means that when rational appeals were used sparingly they were most effective.

Table 7
Rational Appeals and Ad Meter Ranking ANOVA

	SS	df	MS	F	<i>p</i>
Between Groups	2190.499	2	1095.250	3.314	.039*
Within Groups	61473.638	186	330.503		
Total	63664.138	186			

Note: * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

Research Question 3

The third research question asked if certain appeals drew more likability from certain genders and age segments. Crosstabulations and Chi-Square tests were conducted with SPSS in order to analyze the association between appeals and gender approvals. Women preferred 107 commercials compared to men who favored 82 commercials; therefore, percentages are skewed based on the variance in genders in the Ad Meter survey. There was no significant difference between genders in how much people liked ads with sexual appeals (see Table 8).

Women seemed to prefer *minor* and *no* humor appeals (see Table 9), while men enjoyed *major* appeals (57.3%; $n = 47$ vs. 51.4%; $n = 55$), but this difference was not statistically significant. However, there was a significant association between gender and preference for emotional appeals (see Table 10), $\chi^2(2, n = 189) = 27.973, p < .001$. Females preferred a *major* emotional appeal (39.3%; $n = 42$ vs. 6.1%; $n = 5$), while men preferred a more minimal presence coded as *minor* or *none*. Also, although not statistically significant, females were slightly more in favor of *major* rational appeals than men (see Table 11).

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Table 8
Crosstabulation for Sexual Appeals and Gender ($N = 189$)

Gender	None	Minor	Major
Male ($n = 82$)	52 (63.4%)	16 (19.5%)	14 (17.1%)
Female ($n = 107$)	66 (61.7%)	25 (23.4%)	16 (15%)

Table 9
Crosstabulation for Humor Appeals and Gender ($N = 189$)

Gender	None	Minor	Major
Male ($n = 82$)	24 (29.3%)	11 (13.4%)	47 (57.3%)
Female ($n = 107$)	37 (34.6%)	15 (14%)	55 (51.4%)

Table 10
Crosstabulation for Emotional Appeals and Gender ($N = 189$)

Gender	None	Minor	Major
Male ($n = 82$)	41 (50%)	36 (43.9%)	5 (6.1%)
Female ($n = 107$)	39 (36.4%)	26 (24.3%)	42 (39.3%)

Table 11
Crosstabulation for Rational Appeals and Gender ($N = 189$)

Gender	None	Minor	Major
Male ($n = 82$)	39 (47.6%)	8 (9.8%)	35 (42.7%)
Female ($n = 107$)	40 (37.4%)	13 (12.1%)	54 (50.5%)

Ad Meter age segments were broken into five groups, which were made up of the following: < 21, 21 to 34, 35 to 49, 50 to 64, and 65 <. The age groups were then ranked from first to fifth in terms of a likability score. The appeals were compared to the overall to the Ad

Meter likability rankings by an ANOVA, which gives each age segment a specific p-value for the respective appeal type. The raw data suggests that *minor* and *major* sexual appeals were most liked by segments of the population that were 50 to 64 ($M = 2.27$; $p = .589$), and liked second most by respondents 65 and older ($M = 2.36$; $p = .316$), but both data sets were statistically insignificant. By contrast, ages 21 to 34 liked sexual appeals the least ($M = 4.43$; $p = .108$). Humor appeals had the highest likability of any appeals among Ad Meter raters who were 65 and older ($M = 2.14$; $p < .001$) followed by people 50 to 64 ($M = 2.20$; $p = .619$). However, humor appeals were the least liked by respondents that were between the ages of 21 to 34 ($M = 4.58$; $p < .05$). Similarly, people 65 and older ($M = 2.19$; $p < .001$) preferred emotional appeals followed by raters 50 to 64 ($M = 2.21$; $p = .642$), but were the least liked by Ad Meter respondents that were 21 to 34 ($M = 4.54$; $p < .01$).

The most apparent trend that developed from the raw data (although statistically insignificant) was within the millennial segment, consisting of ages 21 to 34. These viewers ranked all of the appeals the lowest of the various segments ($M = 4.51$), but of all of the appeals they disliked sexual appeals the least ($M = 4.43$).

Discussion and Implications

Researchers have devoted a considerable amount of time to analyzing appeals in print-based mediums of advertising, but only limited literature exists on analyzing multiple appeals in television commercials. Additionally, a significant amount of research has been conducted in regards to ethics in advertising, but a great majority of it focuses on the internal ethics of advertising agencies and their corporate social responsibilities. Few studies address the intersection of appeals and commercial advertising during programming that gathers a large

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viewership. This study uses a prominent commercial showcase, the Super Bowl, to analyze sexual, emotional, rational, and humor appeals.

Frequency and Effectiveness

This census study of the 2015, 2016, and 2017 Super Bowl ads revealed that humor appeals were the most frequently used, followed by rational appeals, emotional appeals, and sexual appeals. Certain brands had a higher frequency of commercials, which were the following: Anheuser Busch – 8, T-Mobile – 8, Toyota/ Lexus – 6, NFL – 4, Doritos – 4, Paramount – 4, and 20th Century Fox – 4. Viewer seemed to like commercials more when they used *major* humor appeals, whereas rational appeals functioned the best in a *minor* role by reinforcing other appeals.

An example of a humorous commercial was the *Hero's Journey* (2017) commercial, which featured Melissa McCarthy. She drove a Kia around the world to save the environment, but every time she got to the new location to save the environment she ended up injured by the environment. The constant humorous plot was *major*, but if only one of those instances stood alone it could have been an example of a minor appeal.

The most liked ads were those that used major emotional appeals. An example of a *major* emotional appeal was seen in the *Lost Dog* (2015) commercial, which featured an adorable lost puppy. The puppy escaped from the farmhouse, and ran through the city while the owner hung signs looking for him. The puppy returned in the rain, but was faced by a pack of wolves and just as things looked bleak the Clydesdales came to the rescue and ushered the puppy back to the owner. The moving story, using, evocative music and a sentimental animal, was a *major* appeal, but one of those elements alone would have been *minor*.

Rational appeals, although likable when used minimally, may turn away some viewers watching the Super Bowl because they are a hard-sell tactic and viewers may not enjoy being sold to directly. An example of a *major* rational commercial would be *Positive Feelings* (2015). It was an ad by Loctite, which is a glue, and it presented the functional benefits of the glue. However, it infused elements of humor because the functional benefits were extreme situations such as gluing teeth together, and in some instances gluing couples together.

Major emotional appeals are most likeable best because they use music, compelling stories, and moving imagery in order to form a relationship or impart brand characteristics to a potential consumer. The emotional application of an appeal is a soft-sell tactic, which means consumers may like being emotionally persuaded rather than logically persuaded. It would be prudent for advertisers to use more *major* emotional appeals since these generate the highest likability.

Trends

There was a statistically insignificant drop from year to year in the presence of sexual appeals. Specifically, the presence of *minor* and *major* sexual appeals decreased slightly per year while ads without any sexual appeals increased each year. An example of one of the few popular *major* sexual appeals was *Ryanville* (2016), which featured a town filled with only Ryan Reynolds. Two females drove through the town rubbernecking at the men playing football. The same men were jack hammering shirtless, and then narrowly missed the same man walking his dogs, but he sweetly smiled and waved. The women fanned one another and wanted nothing more than to move into that town. The overly sexualized male fused with humor made it one of the few ads that had high rankings on Ad Meter.

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This decrease in sexual appeals might mark the beginning of a trend if advertisers are gradually phasing out sexual appeals because consumers do not like them. The data in this study suggests that sexual appeals are the least popular form of appeal based on a comparison of appeals present in relation to the Ad Meter commercial rankings. As far as gender, men were somewhat more in favor of *major* sexual appeals than women, but both groups were largely skewed toward favoring *minor* or no sexual appeals, and the differences were not statistically significant.

Gender. There were two gender differences that developed over humor and emotional appeals in commercials. Although statistically insignificant, males preferred *major* humor occurrences and limited emotional appeals. A statistically significant finding was that females preferred *major* emotional appeals and no humor. It is important to note that humor was comprised of different forms such as incongruity, disparagement, and arousal-safety, so some forms of humor may have been more liked by certain genders. Although statistically insignificant males preferred rational appeals while some women preferred rational appeals while some men liked the presence to be *none*. These preferences may fit with certain stereotypes of a variety of men being immature and some women being emotional beings. Therefore, advertisers may position certain brands to be more emotional in nature in order to obtain the added likability of a female consumer. If advertisers desire male likability then they should make the commercial humorous and limit the amount of emotional elements. At the same time the raw numbers do not support the stereotype that men are more grounded in logic because the data shows a slight negative relationship with men and rational appeals. Once again, however, the data was statistically insignificant. Women preferred a greater presence of rational appeals, but both seem

to like the presence to be a *minor*, which may act as a reinforcing agent in a commercial; however, these results were statistically insignificant.

Age. The age segment preferences were cut and dry by category. Although statistically insignificant, raw data suggest that millennials (21-34) disliked every type of appeal more than other age segments. Millennials have been characterized as anxiety-ridden, greedy, shortsighted, narcissistic, and overly sensitive to criticism (Gallicano, Curtin, & Matthews, 2012). The current data is consistent with research suggesting millennials are hard to please. However, it may mean that there was a low volume of millennial respondents used by Ad Meter, which is a footnote for all of the data. There may not have been a large number of millennials represented in the panel, which again is consistent with the characterizations provided by Gallicano et al. (2012). Conversely, the later part of the baby boomer generation (65+) liked most of the commercials, which may show a surplus of that generation participated in the Ad Meter panel.

Future. One interesting trend developed from the comments section of some of the surveys. Sexual appeals, specifically sexism, shifted from negative to affirmative uses (Boddewyn, 1991) during the three years of Super Bowl ads that were analyzed during this study. Some of the most popular commercials developed new sex-based gender appeal archetypes in order to shatter prior sexist stereotypes (This Ad Completely Redefines Like a Girl, 2016). *Like a Girl* (2015) showed how femininity and masculinity is an identity that is powerful, independent, and strong while *Real Strength* (2015) showed that fathers are emotionally aware and compassionate individuals that are there for their kids. *Defy Labels* (2016) broke conventional stereotypes of what is considered to be “girly,” “gay,” or “small” by being juxtaposed by iconic celebrities or athletes. *Cleaner of Your Dreams* (2017) showed how attractive a domestic man (one who cleans) could be. These new themes may be transformative

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to the sexism component of the sexual appeals category (focusing on gender stereotypes), or may create a separate sex-based gender appeal classification of their own. Additionally, sexual appeals seemed to be masked by humor appeals, which often worked to make them more acceptable. Sometimes *major* sexual appeals almost seemed to be *minor* because of the role humor played.

Ethical Framework

Deontological theory puts an emphasis on the duty or obligations of an individual, or in this case an advertising entity. One of those duties is to create a dialogue with consumers in order to gauge feedback. Advertising during the Super Bowl, or any large event that can garner an exorbitant number of viewers, has the potential to shape consumer brand perception. Dialogic theory is means-based (deontological in nature) and focuses on the exchange of ideas.

Advertising practitioners should be prepared to engage in a dialogue about appeals, and the content of commercials. However, there is no formal feedback loop that advertisers adhere to, which means that clients are the only entities that are guaranteed to have their voices heard.

Gower (2008) sets out eight elements to ethical communication, but only six of them can be applied in an advertising context. The ad must be understandable to the audience, it must be truthful, and it must be appropriate for the audience. These elements could be hard to carry out because advertisers may claim that the audience is a specific target audience within the larger viewership, which may work to abdicate responsibility. However, the last three components help keep advertisers accountable. First, there must be an open conversation about the content of the commercials. Next, consumers must have the ability to dictate the topics of the discussion and change the topics. Lastly, the consumers should be able to respond to advertising agencies, and have their views heard.

The only informal feedback loop that exists is via social media like Twitter and Facebook. Agencies are able to use social media management and analytical tools to track how well the commercials are doing. Practitioners can also view developing hashtag trends in order to gauge appeals that may be favored or disliked. This may be the only source for consumer feedback, but it does not guarantee any changes will be made in the future. There is also no guarantee that the practitioners read all of the comments because of the influx of responses. Therefore, there is no assurance that the potential consumers will be heard by advertising entities. However, if the advertising agencies were to be actively engaged in a dialogue with potential consumers out of a duty to create more ethical content then it would be reasonable to expect a change in the frequency of certain appeals.

The two-way dialogic model may be the reason why the presence of humor appeals coded as *none* increased slightly each year (see Table 1, Table 2, & Table 3). This may be a response to a high volume of females voicing their opinions via social media, which is paralleled by the high involvement of females in this study. Females were shown to not like humor appeals, and this knowledge coupled with high involvement may be the direct reason why there was an increase in humor coded as *none*. Advertisers could have analyzed the data out of a duty to deliver more relevant content to consumers, which is an attempt at completing an ethical dialogue.

Additionally, sexual appeals decreased slightly from 2015 to 2017. Although this decrease was statistically insignificant, it might mark the beginning of a trend. For example, companies like GoDaddy.com have been known for their highly sexual commercials year-in-and-year-out, but starting in 2015 GoDaddy.com commercials contained fewer sexual appeals. Instead, its commercials have begun to center on rational appeals and focus on functional

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benefits of the site. This may have been caused by negative feedback, and an attempt to answer with more ethically pleasing content. This would be similar to the 2015 Super Bowl commercial that was leaked, retracted, and replaced by GoDaddy. These changes may point to a duty to do good work for clients while also considering consumer feedback (however informal it may be). This discourse-based ethical framework shows an exchange of ideas flowing from potential consumer that allow for changes to be made in the future.

For practitioners, this study provides valuable insights as to how certain appeals are interpreted and received by consumers during the Super Bowl. Since the event serves as a commercial showcase for the unveiling of the newest campaigns this analysis identifies popular appeals-based tactics that can be carried out in future ads in order to improve ratings or viewer response. Additionally, this survey is a summary of the last three years of Super Bowl ads, which may help give advertisers a better understanding of the commercial space. It also provides ethical considerations for dialogic feedback loop in order to gauge potential consumer praise and criticism. The information is then used in order to garner better responses from potential consumers.

Academically, this is one of the few studies that attempt to analyze multiple appeals during the Super Bowl in order to present empirical data. Since the Super Bowl is an extravagant event and draws an equally large number of viewers it warrants more research because of the potential to influence of a large audience by generating consumer likability. This study also adds to a growing area of study that includes Super Bowl commercial content and attempts to draw analyze the likability of certain appeals and how dialogue may aid agencies in presenting a more universally liked concept.

Limitations and Future Research

There are several areas of limitations in this paper as well as parts that lend themselves to future research. First, this paper was a quantitative analysis of appeals in Super Bowl commercials, but it does not explain why the appeals are present, nor does it gauge advertiser's anticipated target audience. If a future study were conducted it would be interesting to see a comparison of anticipated results versus actual results in order to see how successful the commercial was from both a client and consumer perspective.

Second, the study focused on only three years of Super Bowl advertising because those were the only years that Ad Meter had ranked. If it were possible, a larger sample would have helped validate more of the trends seen in the data. It would also help uncover underlying cultural trends that develop over time due to the longitudinal nature of the study. Future research should incorporate more commercials or do a separate study that gauges commercial appeals without the rankings.

Third, the study is localized to a westernized culture and to only the Super Bowl, which gauges appeals in accordance with individualistic philosophies. It would be interesting for future research to use a collectivistic lens in order to analyze the same data, or to gauge both and see which would be the most effective. The next step would be to gauge commercials during other events that garner a large viewership. Additionally, the study was subject to a likability scale that was very subjective and provided very little information about the panelists. Therefore, there is no way of knowing what cultures were represented, how many representatives of each gender, or how many people presented each age segment. It would also be interesting to expand on the reasons why certain appeals are present from year to year and whether cultural or political reasons contributed to the change in appeals.

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Fourth, the coding in this study did not include any ethical elements. The entire ethical framework would have benefited from more data driven results instead of conjecture. The study uses implications to offer an ethical framework for advertisers. However, future research could incorporate an ethical coding mechanism in order to gauge how ethical commercials are.

Fifth, the trends developed around Millennials and the reduction in sexual appeals from year to year that were the largest insights were both statistically insignificant, and may have been due to the small sample size of the study. Future research could examine more commercials to see if there really is a trend toward fewer sexual appeals, and if there is cultural and political interplay as well. Consumer behavior was beyond the scope of this study, but future research can analyze whether appeals present in commercials have an effect on consumer behavior..

Finally, the methods were strictly quantitative with a brief section that allowed for extra thoughts or observations. Future research should be quantitative and qualitative in order to provide more answers as to why certain appeals may be present and how they relate to the brand. This would drastically improve the quality of information and help derive greater insights. Additionally, creating a study that gauges the effectiveness of appeals used in Super Bowl ads could provide advertisers with more information in order to create more effective campaigns in the future.

Conclusion

Advertising is an important element of strategic communications, and when it can be used to create a high degree of likability in consumers it warrants more research. Advertising is the art of persuading and informing the public to support a product or service. By understanding how appeals are perceived by a cross-section of the American population, appeals can be better utilized in future commercial campaigns in order to provoke favorable rankings on Ad Meter.

This study serves as valuable information to improve academic and practitioner knowledge and future research can build off of this study by analyzing the links between appeals and retention, or consumer behavior.

Appendix A
Super Bowl Ads Code Book

Coder: The coder should fill in the first two initials of his or her last name.

Commercial Year: Enter the year the ad was aired in the long format. (e.g., 2009 not '09)

Ad Meter Ranking: The numerical ranking the ad is assigned for the given year (1-66).

Commercial Title: Write the title of the commercial listed on Ad meter.

Commercial Advertiser: Write the name of the company that is represented in the ad. (The advertiser is listed above the video).

Commercial Length: Write the commercial running time, which will be listed at the bottom of the YouTube video.

Who is the source: Write down whether the main speaker or character is a notable athlete, celebrity, or an everyday individual. Mark all that apply, and if it is "other" please explain.

Ad performance gender: Under the "breakdown" section of the ad meter video there are likability statistics of the ad. Please list the gender that had the highest likability rating.

Ad performance age: Under the "breakdown" section of the ad meter video there are likability statistics of the ad. Please list the age range that had the highest likability rating.

For the next four categories, use the scale of None (0), Minor (1) and Major (2).

Rational appeals: If the commercial contains any appeals that use logical argument, facts, show a thought process, or explicitly state benefits of the product that speak to its functional purpose then it is using a rational appeal. Additionally, the commercial may list characteristics that contribute to the uniqueness of the product. Write down any examples or describe the actions that correspond to the appeal in the commercial.

Minor: Making a comparison of two objects that are clearly not the same, but share similar qualities (e.g., a fast car and a fast animal).

Major: Listing real statistics or information about the product benefits, breaking down how much it costs, or explaining how the product compares to a competing brand (e.g., an Audi and a Jaguar). Note: three or more minor appeals in the same commercial should be coded as "major" overall, which is the standard for all of the following appeals.

Emotional appeals: If the commercial evokes emotion using musical cues, adorable animals, or touching stories then it is a good indicator of an emotional appeal. Often this type of commercial involves ordinary people that make an item relatable or show how a product or item can positively or negatively affect the user (it can also show how not using the product could impact someone). Write down any examples or describe the actions that correspond to the appeal in the commercial.

Minor: Talking about how someone will feel before, after, or while using the product (e.g., words such as: “like,” “enjoy,” or “feel”). Stating that the viewer will experience some form of sensation or transformation as a result of using the product. The feeling or transformation does not have to be verbally stated. It can also be symbolically shown through moving imagery.

Major: Listen for words like “love” or “hate.” Also, look for moving stories that are coupled with motivational or emotion evoking music. The combination of moving music and very powerful stories are major emotional appeals.

Appeals to humor: Humor appeals take on three different forms: arousal-safety, incongruity, and disparagement. *Arousal-safety* is the escape or deviation from social norms, and can also incorporate emotional elements that create laughter (e.g., fear or anxiety relief, inner secrets, awkward encounters, or child innocence). *Incongruity* is the contrast between two circumstances that do not match up, or if the music clashes with what is being shown (e.g., a surprise twist, irony, or an exaggeration). *Disparagement* is based on malice, hostility, aggression, or laughing at the misfortunes of others. Write down any examples or describe the actions that correspond to the appeal in the commercial.

Minor: If a single instance of arousal-safety (e.g., a child making a mess or a dog destroying a pillow), incongruity (expectation versus reality), or disparagement (e.g., putdowns, malicious joy, or social chaos) is present the commercial is “minor” overall. However, if there are three or more total instances of arousal-safety, incongruity and/or disparagement then it should be upgraded to “major.”

Major: If there are multiple forms of humor occurring simultaneously then the commercial is automatically a “major” appeal. Additionally, if humor is the focus of the plot or if the commercial is perpetually one moment of humor followed by another (e.g., when the entire commercial builds up to one point of humor).

Appeals to sex: Sex appeals are broken into three categories: sexism, symbolic/overt sexuality, and sexual objectification. *Sexism* in commercials will be portrayed as classic gender stereotypes like the following: stupid dad, womanizer, and domestic woman. *Symbolic/Overt sexuality* is characterized as nudity or the lack thereof, but there are varying degrees of overt sexuality (e.g., demure, partially clad, or nude) as well as symbolic sexuality (e.g., erect, prone, soft, hard, moist objects that are phallic in nature). *Sexual objectification* refers to a gender that is used as a decoration in order to attract attention of viewers (e.g., oiled up woman/man or woman straddling a car). Write down any examples or describe the actions that correspond to the appeal in the commercial.

Minor: If there are traces of sexism or symbolic sexuality in the commercial then it can qualify as “minor” appeals, but if both are present then they would be upgraded to “major.” If there are more than three instances of either appeal then it will still qualify as “major.”

Major: If there are examples of overt sexuality or sexual objectification in the commercial then it can qualify as “major.” If there are three or more instances of “minor” appeals then it should be reclassified as “major.”

Other observations: Write down any additional observations you may have taken note of during the commercial.

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Appendix B

Coder: _____ Commercial Year (xxxx): _____

Super Bowl Ads Cod Sheet

1. Ad Meter Ranking: _____

2. Commercial Title: _____

3. Commercial Brand: _____

4. Commercial Length: _____

5. Who is the source? Mark all that apply.

Celebrity (0) Athlete (1) Normal Person (2) Other (3)

6. According to the ad performance meter what gender liked the ad more?

Male (0) Female (1)

7. According to the ad performance meter, please rank the age segment likeability from greatest to least.

<21 (0) 21-34 (1) 35-49 (2) 50-64 (3) 65+ (4)

8. Any rational appeals? None (0) Minor (1) Major (2)

Describe:

9. Any emotional appeals? None (0) Minor (1) Major (2)

Describe:

10. Any humor appeals? None (0) Minor (1) Major (2)

Describe:

11. Any sexual appeals? None (0) Minor (1) Major (2)

Describe:

12. Other observation

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Vita

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In August 2015, he enrolled in graduate study at Texas Christian University, where he received his Master of Science degree in Strategic Communication. While working on his graduate degree he worked at CBS as a News Production Assistant.

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Abstract

SUPER BOWL AND SUPER COMMERCIALS: AN APPEALS-BASED ANALYSIS ON SUPER BOWL ADS

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The Super Bowl is an extravagant sporting event that fuses an eclectic mix of entertainment in order to draw a large number of viewers. The lucrative sporting spectacle is also used as a commercial showcase for new advertising campaigns, and can be viewed as one of the biggest days (if not the biggest) in a calendar year for advertisers. This quantitative study analyzes the presence of sexual, rational, emotional, and humor appeals in 189 Super Bowl commercials from 2015-2017. The study reveals that humor is the most frequently used appeal in Super Bowl advertising, followed by rational, emotional, and sexual appeals. An interesting trend of a reduction in sexual appeals began to emerge. Additionally, a trend of apathetic millennials also developed based on age preferences set by Ad Meter. Lastly, given the prominence of Super Bowl advertising in cultural discourse, the author considers ethical implications associated with the commercial appeals.