

Perception of Super Bowl XLVI TV Advertisements in the USA: A Case of College Students

Okan Akcay, DBA

Qian (Susan) Sun, PhD

Liangyu Chen, MBA

Professor of Marketing
Department of Business Administration
College of Business, DF # 217
Kutztown University of Pennsylvania
Kutztown, Pennsylvania, 19530, USA

Abstract

The purpose of this research paper is to analyze male and female perceptions of Super Bowl XLVI advertising among college students in the USA. The Super Bowl promises to deliver on three main benefits for the audience, an exciting football game, very memorable ads from different industries and a half-time show (Bickle, 2012; Liguori, 2012). Popular commercials can play a critical role in helping to shape customer perception and influence buying decisions. This study has four sections: introduction and importance of topic, review of literature, methodology and hypotheses, and presentation of results and conclusions.

Key Words: Marketing, Sports Marketing, Super Bowl Advertising and Consumer Behavior.

1. Introduction

The Super Bowl and the World Series are two high profile sporting events that are extremely attractive to advertisers. Similar amounts of advertising dollars are spent on both events (McKenna, et al., 2012) but there are significant differences between the two. The Super Bowl is a one game, one day telecast and the World Series is four to seven games spread over a one to two week period (Kelley, et al., 2004; Parry, 2005; Mohr, 2007; Kim, et al., 2011; Steinberg, 2008). People won't be watching the World Series just to see the commercials-which happens fairly often during the Super Bowl. People won't be standing around the water cooler discussing World Series commercials and nobody will be making videos or TV shows about them either. Super Bowl advertising has become a major advertisement phenomenon.

Super Bowl XLVI was watched by nearly one billion people worldwide, in more than 225 countries. Over 111 million people-nearly 1/3 of American consumers-watched the Super Bowl (Eisenstein, 2012; Steinberg, 2012; Clark, et al., 2009). Its popularity is driven by marketing forces such as TV advertisers, corporate sponsorship, publicity-media, entertainment, technology, and economic activities at the host cities (Tomkovick, Claire and Yelkur, 2001). According to a Wall Street estimate, companies have spent \$ 2.5 billion on Super Bowl advertising over the past ten years. In 1967, the cost of a thirty second advertising spot was 37,500 dollars (Klara, 2001). Now it is about \$ 3.5 million (Bickle, 2012). Advertising costs have been rising faster than the viewership of the game (Schneider, 2012). Costs for the 2013 Super Bowl ads are approaching \$ 4 million (Eisenstein, 2012). The top five Super Bowl advertisers are Anheuser-Busch InBev, PepsiCo, General Motors, Time Warner (Warner Bros.) and the Walt Disney Company. The majority of movies advertised during the game have been box office hits (Yelkur et al., 2004). GM has spent more than \$ 135 million on ads over the last 10 years- more than Ford, Toyota and Hyundai combined (<http://dailyfinance.com>; Rovell, 2012). Super Bowl ads cost about three cents per view for Coca-Cola, PepsiCo, and GM because of the large amount of present and potential customers most likely to watch the Bowl game (<http://blog.thepertgroup.com/blog>; Schneider, 2012). They have a huge target market and market share in the U.S. As long as there is a demand for advertising during the Super Bowl, the price of advertising will not come down (Adweek, 2012).

But it is well worth the investment for ads (Kim, et al., 2005) that create publicity, brand awareness, and a lasting impression of a company's products among a huge audience, as well as increase market share (Yelkur, et al., 2004; Wood, 2012; <http://blog.thepertgroup.com/blog>).

College students are a very important segment of the market for soft drinks, snacks, fast food and other beverages (Kotler and Keller, 2012). They tend to watch the Super Bowl in group settings. Most male students are interested in the game itself and enjoy humorous ads. Female students are more interested in the entertainment aspects and party atmosphere of the game (Johnson and Lee, 2011). According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the current total college population is over 20 million-11 million females and 9 million males. The NFL and advertisers have been considering attracting more female consumers to watch the Super Bowl. This segment of the market is crucial to marketers because over half of the U.S. population is female (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012), and women control approximately 2/3 of disposable income and 88% of all household purchases in the U.S. (Clark, et al., 2009; Schiffman, et al., 2009; Akcay and Sun, 2012). This research will try to analyze the perception of Super Bowl XLVI commercials among college students, to determine if there are significant differences between male and female student perceptions and what implications there may be for advertisers.

2. Review Literature

The TV audience for the Super Bowl has about doubled over the past decade (<http://dailyfinance.com>). During this time period, the amount of interest in Super Bowl ads has increased regardless of economic conditions in the U.S. (Kim, et al., 2005). According to a Nielsen survey, 51% of the Super Bowl audience enjoys the commercials more than the game (Newell and Wu, 2003; McKenna, 2012). The popularity of the commercials has led to advertising time/space being sold out every year. Companies want their brand exposed to one of the largest and relatively diverse TV audiences-over 100 million people in the U.S. according to retail advertising and marketing associations (Kim, et al., 2005).

The majority of consumers (73%) watch Super Bowl ads solely for entertainment purposes (Bickle, 2012; Kelley and Turley, 2004); only 8.4% of all consumers influenced intend to purchase advertised products (Fescenmeyer, 2012). Advertising sponsors and TV audiences both have great expectations (Liguori, 2012; <http://lovehateadvertising.com>). People talk about the Super Bowl game, the half-time show, celebrities (Mohr, 2007), and the cleverness and content of the ads (Liguori, 2012; Fescenmeyer, 2012). Some companies (Apple, Chrysler) try to sell an idea, emotion, or memory in addition to creating a buzz (word of mouth) for their company's brand (Mohr, 2007). More money is spent on advertising goods rather than services during the Super Bowl (Clark, et al., 2009; Kelley and Turley, 2004). Advertisers also use the World Wide Web (The Kiplinger Letter, 2012) as part of their integrated marketing communications campaign to extend the Super Bowl ad exposure beyond game day (Kim, et al., 2005, Steinberg, 2008). Another study suggests that advertisement increases brand opinion (16%) and purchase consideration of a product increases 13% in the week following the Super Bowl (Johnson and Lee, 2011).

The amount of network Super Bowl advertising time is increasing as well as the number of first time Super Bowl advertisers. The price of advertising during the Super Bowl has almost quadrupled in the past ten years. It is 17-18 times more expensive than the average cost of other prime-time commercials (<http://www.marketing.com>). The top ten spenders accounted for more than 1/3 of the total dollars spent on Super Bowl ads (<http://dailyfinance.com>).

It is very costly to advertise during the Super Bowl and companies expect a future return on their investment. The majority of top ad spenders (beer, soft drink, snack, and fast food companies) increased their market share or increased stock value (Newell and Wu, 2003; McKenna, 2012). The main purpose of the top ad spenders, who have been market leaders, was to maintain their market share, rather than increase it (Kotler and Keller, 2009; McKenna, 2011). The Super Bowl TV audience seems to prefer product ads such as films, entertainment, and food and beverages (Yelkur, et al., 2004; Kim, et al., 2011).

Super Bowl ads have the potential to be a very effective marketing strategy (Klara, 2011). Based on product failures, change in market share, share price and sales, eight out of ten brands wasted money on Super Bowl ads (<http://dailyfinance.com>). Advertisers can improve recall of their ads by concentrating their efforts on the length, frequency, and placement of the ads (Newell and Henderson, 1998).

One study suggests that ads placed at the beginning of the game were recalled significantly more by viewers than those placed later in the broadcast (Newell and Wu, 2003; Newell, et al., 2001). Ads can be made more effective by telling stories, using emotional appeals (Steinberg, 2012; Kelley and Turley, 2004; Pavelchak, et al., 1998) to influence recall by using celebrities (actors, professional athletes). The “Mean Joe Green” ad for Coca Cola (Klara, 2011) and “Darth Vader” for Volkswagen (Liguori, 2012) are examples of the best or most memorable Super Bowl ads which have been very effective and legendary. Countless hours are spent each year creating the best ads for the Super Bowl spectacle (Kim, et al., 2011). The use of animals (Budweiser Clydesdales) and babies (E-Trade) is another way to make Super Bowl ads more fun and memorable. A new research study suggests that Super Bowl ads are more successful after watching a close exciting sport event (Searles, 2012). These types of ads create an excellent selling environment and brand awareness among potential customers. Super Bowl advertising and sponsorship increased brand familiarity and/or likeability especially for brands that were new to Super Bowl advertising and the marketplace (Russell, et al., 2004). If viewers are watching for entertainment purposes, advertisers should make sure that the ads are creative, exciting and entertaining (<http://lovehateadvertising.com>; <http://www.pweb.com>). It would be a good idea for advertisers to avoid making quality claims or giving price information (Newell and Henderson, 1998).

3. Methodology-Data Collection

Data was collected during the week following the Super Bowl XLVI game from undergraduate students at Kutztown University who were enrolled in College of Business classes. 500 questionnaires were distributed to freshmen through senior students with various majors. 466 questionnaires were returned and 421 were usable (filled by students who watched the Super Bowl XLVI game). A total of 251 males and 161 females participated. The response rate was close to 90.3%. The questionnaire was divided into two sections; the first section dealt with perception and impressions of Super Bowl commercials. The second section consisted of demographic variables of the respondents. Multiple choice and open-ended questions were used to structure the questionnaire. A convenience sampling was utilized to collect the data, with the help of Kutztown University College of Business faculty.

College students are very important segment for Super Bowl advertisers. They represent 11 million loyal male and female customers who purchase products that are advertised during the Super Bowl. The perception and influence of Super Bowl advertising differs among genders according to the literature. This study will analyze the following hypotheses:

4. Hypotheses

H1- The gender effect is significant in the expectations on Super Bowl Ads: Males have higher expectations.

H2- The gender effect is significant in the understanding of Super Bowl Ads. Males have a better understanding of Super Bowl ads.

H3- The gender effect is significant in the intention to purchase or the actual purchase of products from Super Bowl sponsors. Males have more intention to buy or actually purchase more.

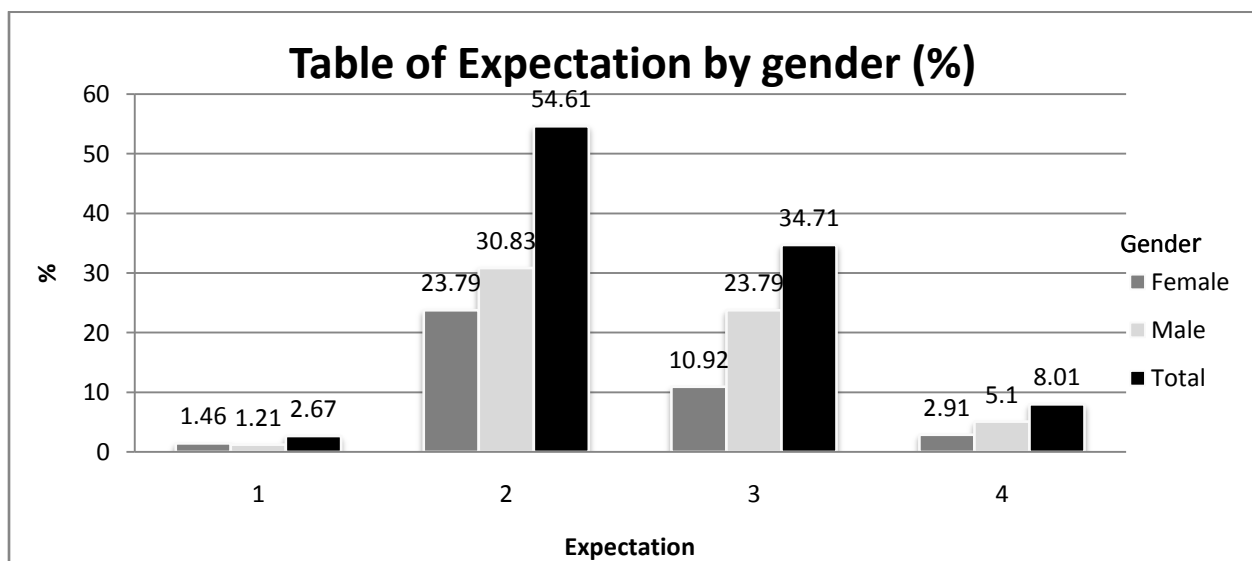
H4- Super Bowl ads are amusing, funny, clever or entertaining for the majority of students. The gender effect is significant in the impressions of Super Bowl ads.

5. Analysis and Findings

Table 1: summarizes how the hypotheses are supported by data

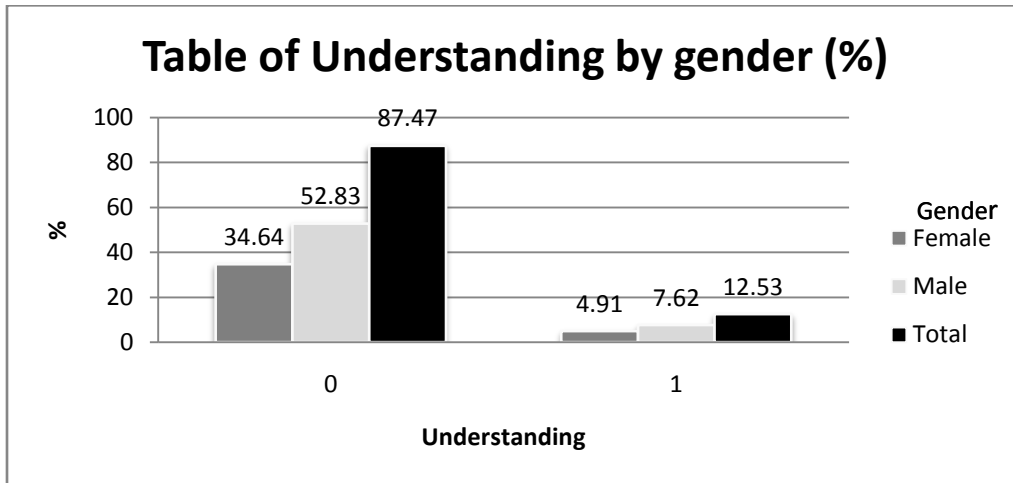
Hypotheses	Results	Student’s T-test P Value is reported (Difference in Scores between female and Male)
H1 The gender effect is significant in the expectations on Super Bowl Ads: Males have a higher expectations	supported	<0.0001
H2 The gender effect is significant in the understanding of Super Bowl Ads. Males have a better understanding of Super Bowl ads.	supported	<0.0001
H3 The gender effect is significant in the intention to purchase, or the purchase of products from Super Bowl sponsors. Males have more intention to buy or actually purchased more.	supported	<0.0001
H4 Super Bowl ads are amusing, funny, clever or entertaining for a majority of the students. The gender effect is significant in the impressions on Super Bowl ads.	Supported	<0.0001

The following figures are developed from the survey data and will help to explain the above table. In particular, the expectation and understanding of the super bowl games by female and male students respectively and as a whole was looked at. In addition, the students were asked whether they were motivated to make a purchase from the Super Bowl sponsors after viewing their ads. The general impressions on the ads are presented at the end.

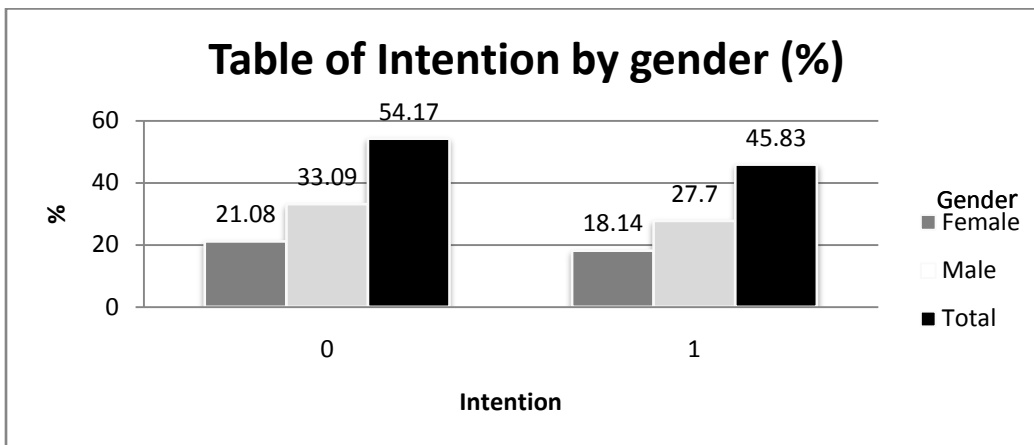


The horizontal axis shows the following expectations regarding the super bowl ads: 1: Exceeded my expectations. 2: Met my expectations. 3: Disappointed. 4: No Expectations.

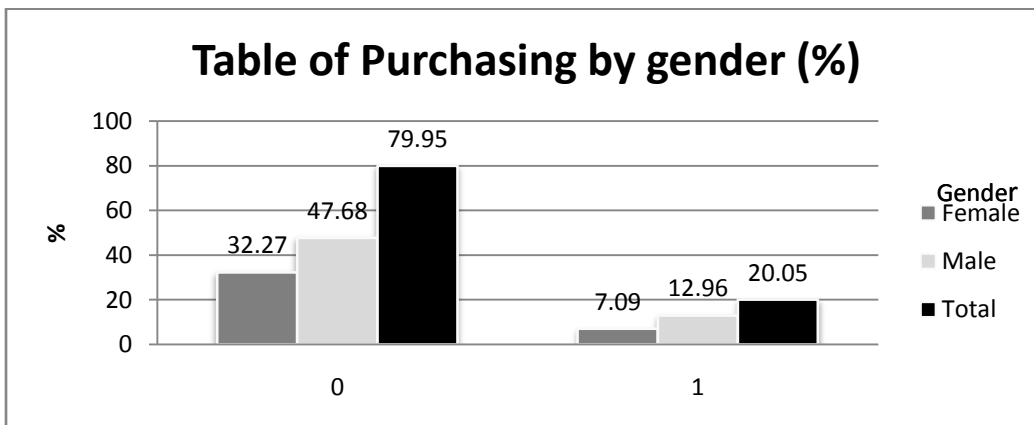
Males generally have a higher expectation for the super bowl. The TT-test shows that the gender effect is significant with a less than 0.0001 p value.



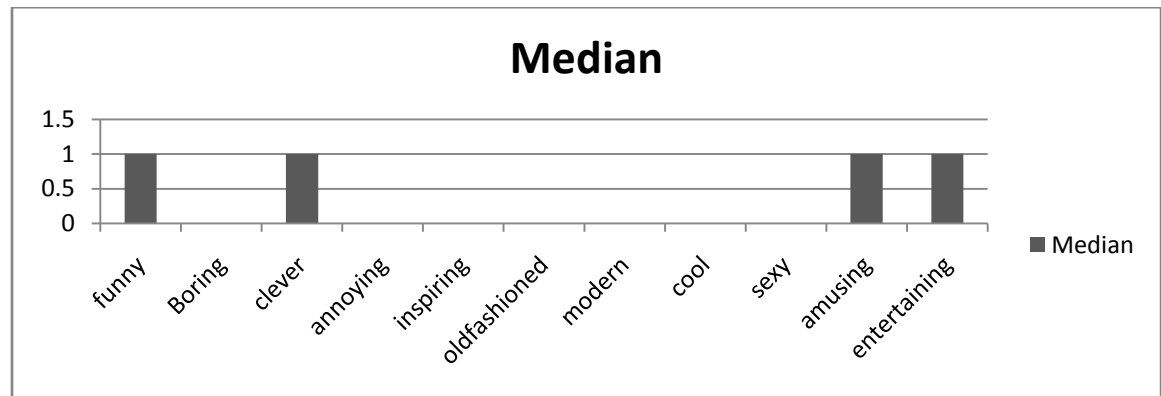
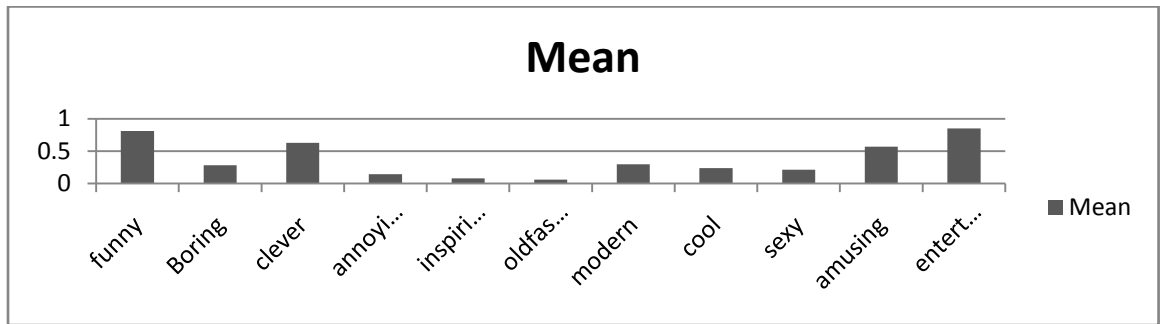
On the X-axis, 1: Super Bowl ad was difficult to understand and 0: Super Bowl ad was NOT difficult to understand. About 87% of students felt that Super Bowl ads were easy to understand. Males have a better understanding of Super Bowl Ads.



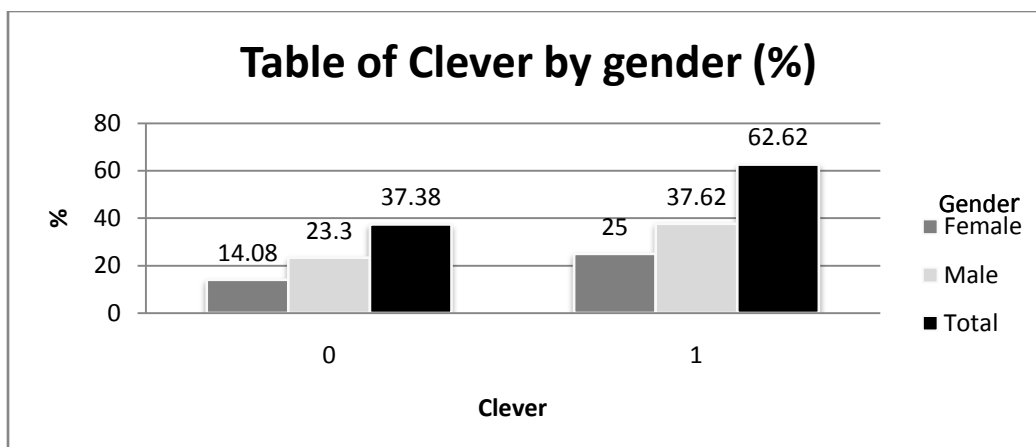
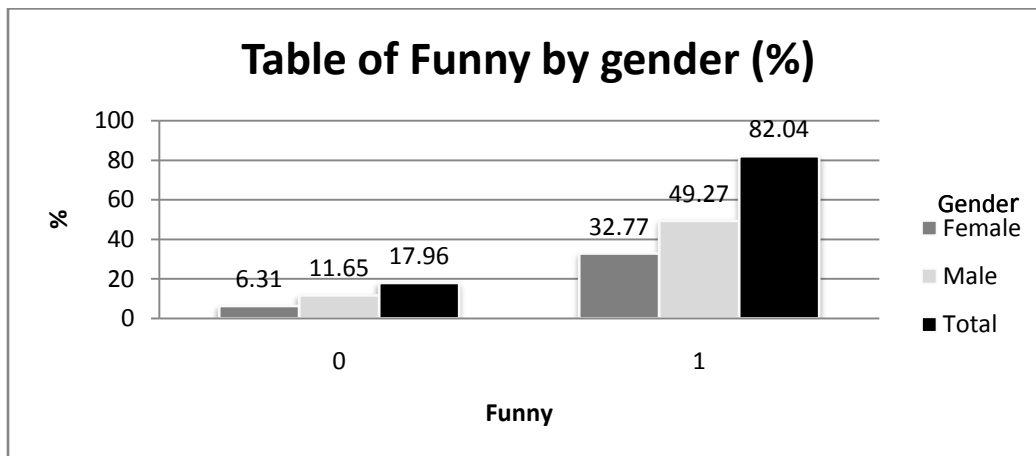
The survey item on the X-axis was trying to measure the students’ intention to purchase after seeing the ads: 1: The ads made me want to try the products. 0: I didn’t have any intention to try the products. About 46% of students were motivated to try the products after watching the ads. Males have more intention to purchase.

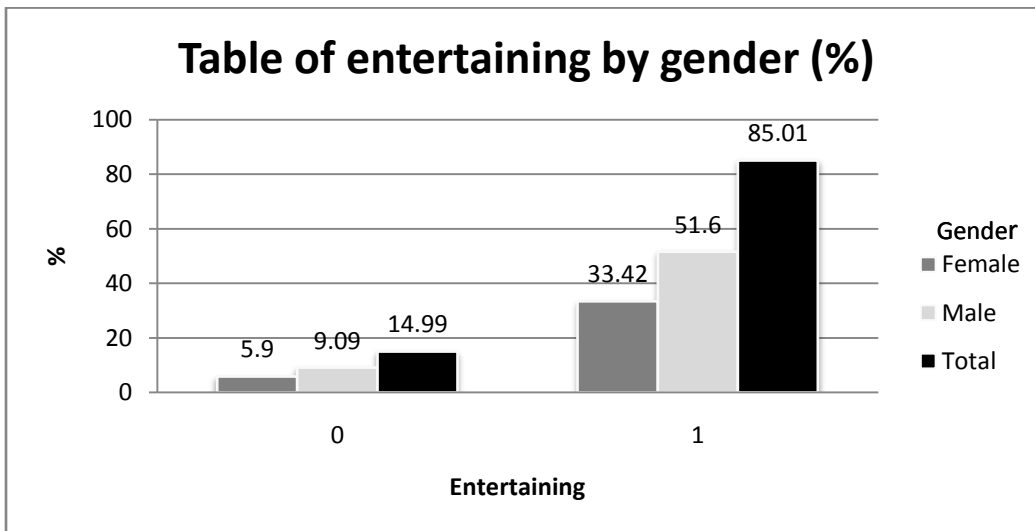
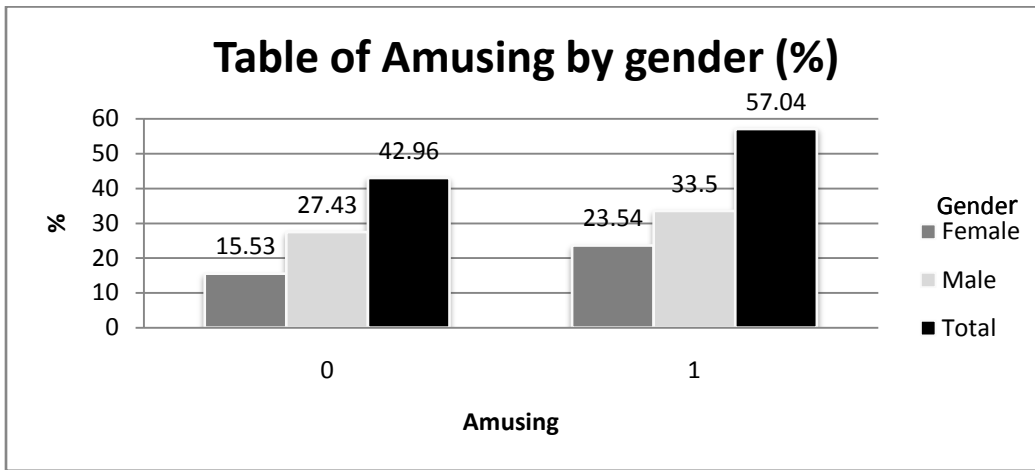


This figure depicts whether students actually tried the products after watching the ads. 1=tried, 0=Not tried. It shows on average 20.05% students actually purchased the products after watching the ads. The gender effect is significant.

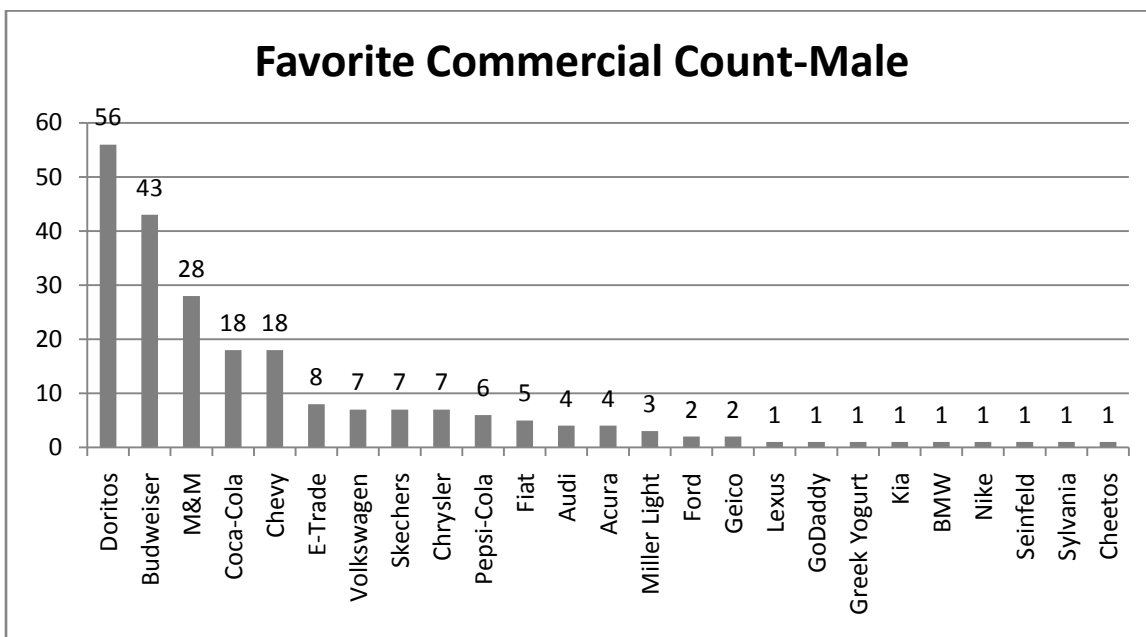


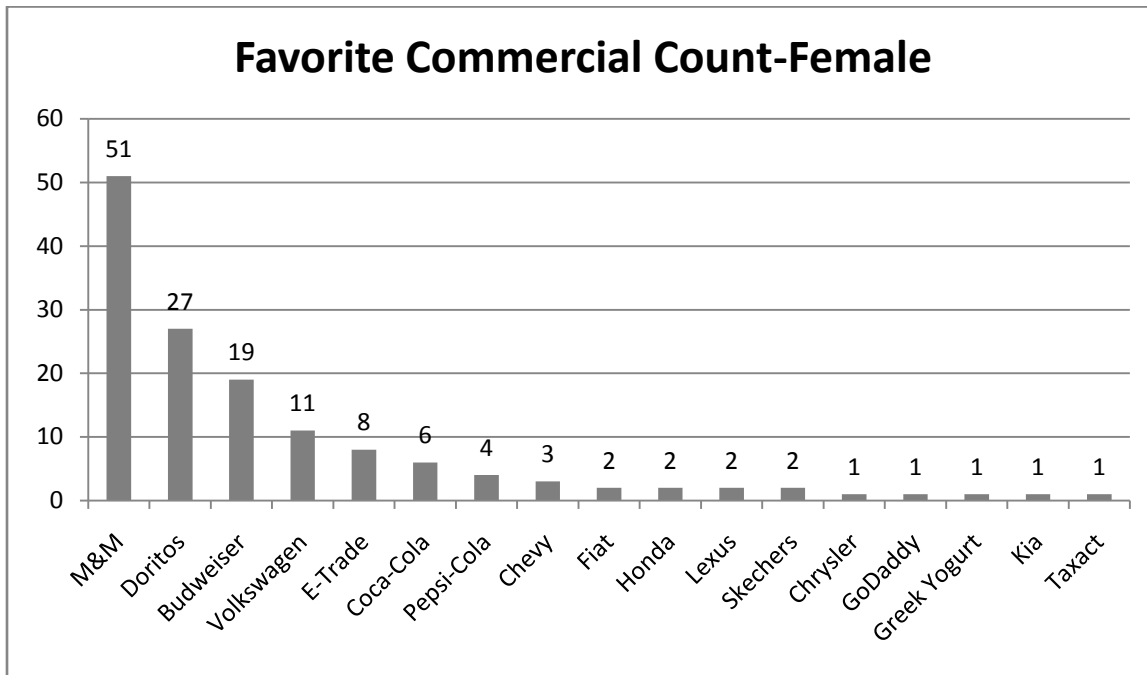
This table relates to the students impressions of the Super Bowl ads. The students were asked to express their feelings by marking that apply. Four impressions stand out in terms of Mean and Median scores: FUNNY, CLEVER, AMUSING and ENTERTAINING. The following four figures further explore the gender effects:



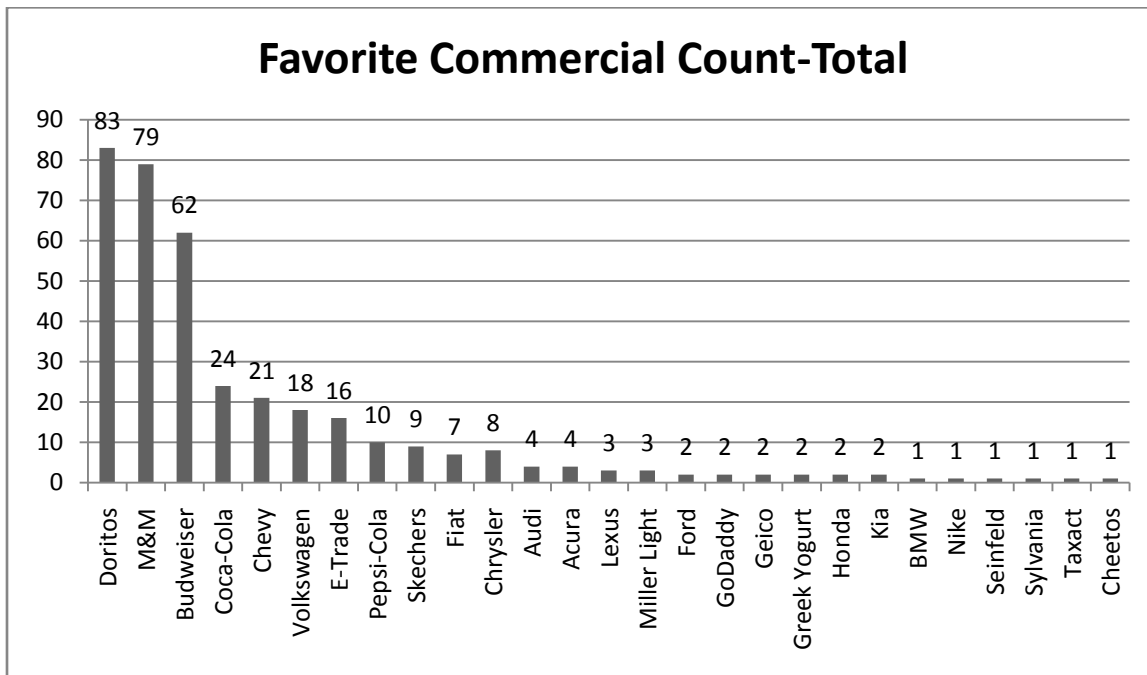


About 82% of students thought Super Bowl ads were Funny, 62% thought they were Clever, 57 % thought they were Amusing and 85% thought they were Entertaining. The gender effects are significant in all cases. In this section, the results on the most favorite ads as rated by the sample students are presented.





The top favorite ads of male and female students included the same ads but occur in a different order. For example; male students' top five favorite ads were Doritos # 1, Budweiser # 2, M&M's, # 3, Coca-Cola # 4, and Chevy # 5. Female's top five favorite ads were M&M's # 1, Doritos # 2, Budweiser # 3, Volkswagen # 4 and E-Trade # 5.



Major networks and other organizations rate the Super Bowl ads every year. The ratings from two of these groups; The Wall Street Journal (WSJ) and The USA Today's Facebook Super Bowl Ad Meter Scores were used to compare to the results of this research study. There were some similarities between the results. Out of the top 12 favorite ads, eight were the same between this study and the WSJ; six were the same as the USA Today's Facebook Ad Meter. The others varied within the top 12 in all 3 sets of results. The WSJ top ad was the Bud Light (Weego-Recue Dog) ad; for USA Today Facebook Super Bowl Ad Meter Scores and for this study, the Doritos (Sling Shot Baby) ad was the favorite. The car, snack food, soda and beer industries spend tremendous amounts of money on Super Bowl ads.

For the most part, it seems to have paid off. Within the WSJ's top 12, Bud Light was # 1, Doritos # 2 and # 6, Volkswagen # 3, Acura # 4, Fiat # 5, M&M's # 7, Camaro # 8, Kia # 9, Honda # 10, and Chrysler # 11. In the USA Today Facebook Super Bowl Ad Meter is top 12 were Doritos # 1 (sling Baby) and # 6 (Man's Best Friend), Bud Light (Weego-Rescue Dog) # 2, Kia # 3, Chrysler # 4, M&M's # 5, Volkswagen # 7, Audi # 9, Dannon Oikos # 10, Chevrolet # 11 and # 12. The results from this study were Doritos # 1, M&M's # 2, Budweiser # 3, Coco-Cola # 4, Chevy # 5, Volkswagen # 6, Pepsi-Cola # 8, Fiat # 10, Chrysler (Clint Eastwood) # 11 and # 12(<http://www.usatoday.com>, 2012;<http://graphics.wsj.com>, 2012).

6. Conclusions

The Super Bowl was watched by close to one billion people around the world. It is the biggest sport and entertainment event for Americans-over one hundred million viewers. Companies spend billions of dollars to sponsor and advertise their products during the Super Bowl. More advertising dollars are spent on goods rather than services. Super Bowl advertising has been an effective marketing strategy for companies to create an excellent selling environment, brand image and brand awareness among one of the largest TV audiences for a one day sporting event. Advertisers have been using the World Wide Web as part of an integrated marketing communication campaign to extend the Super Bowl advertisement exposure beyond game day.

The big spenders on 2012 Super Bowl ads were auto companies, fast food and beverage manufacturers, and movie studios (Liguori, 2012; <http://lovehateadvertising.com>). CNN reported that the average Super Bowl viewer spends more than \$60.00 on Super Bowl related merchandise, apparel, food and beverages over the week leading up to and including game day (Yelkur, et al., 2004; Wood, 2012). Consumers will spend billions of dollars on related items such as TV's, entertainment centers/systems, and furniture. It is estimated that \$300-400 million is poured into the local economy where the Super Bowl is held (Mohr, 2007).

College students have been loyal customers of the Super Bowl. They watch the game in large groups and enjoy the entertainment aspect of the event with a party atmosphere. They are a very valuable segment for products advertised during the Super Bowl such as soft drinks snacks, pizza, fast food and alcoholic beverages. They are also potential consumers for all other products in the future. This research, conducted among college students, reveals the following findings:

The perception of Super Bowl advertising is highly affected by gender. Male and female college student's expectations for Super Bowl advertising are widely different. Male expectation is higher than female. Male students have a higher intention to buy advertised products. Super Bowl advertisements are amusing, funny, clever and entertaining for the majority of students, regardless of gender. The top twelve favorite ads were rated differently among the college students in our study and the USA Today Facebook Super Bowl ad meter scores and The Wall Street Journal. The reason may be because of the age of our sample of students.

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